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TURNING WORDS INTO ACTION: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING HOW IDEOLOGY LINKS CONTEXT AND CHANGE

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"Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind." –Rudyard Kipling

"Every quotation contributes something to the stability or enlargement of the language." –Samuel Johnson

"Language is called the garment of thought: however, it should rather be, language is the flesh garment, the body of thought." –Thomas Carlyle

"The language that reveals also obscures." –Wendell Berry

"As was his language, so was his life." –Seneca

"Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounc'd it to you, trippingly on the tongue." –William Shakespeare

"The word is the making of the world." –Wallace Stevens

This is really a study about the power of words and language. I have always been fascinated by words—both spoken and written. I remember when I first learned to read that I was thrilled with this new world at my command. No longer would I have to rely on others to present this world of words to me—it was mine for the taking. Words can both create and destroy. Words produce knowledge and action. I am indebted to those who have honed my use of language, and in a few words, I would like to thank them.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine how context affects the ideological content of school district leadership as it enacts change. The political pressure which demands public school reform has created an environment of hasty decision-making, high stakes accountability systems, and uncertainty. In the presence of this pressure, this ethnographic case study examined how one mid-sized urban public school district responds with strides toward positive change. The data were collected through participant observation, interviews, and written artifacts. Once analyzed, the data revealed that an effectively communicated ideology allows district leaders to use language about their beliefs concerning the political environment to impel members of the organization to take certain action toward a process of change.

Chapter I: Introduction

This study explored how one school district pursues change by balancing the need to respond to political demands with the need to support the development of a strong organizational culture. The purpose of this study was to examine how context affects the ideological content presented by district leaders in the change process. The predominate method of inquiry was applied ethnography. The district under investigation was purposefully selected as a mid-size, urban public school district with eighty percent of its student body qualifying for free and reduced lunch and a new superintendent who has made it clear that his major goal is to guide the district through a process of system-wide change.

Background and context

America is enamored with the idea of stars: individuals who rise above the crowd and perform feats that seem impossible. In "The Talent Myth," Malcolm Gladwell (2002) explains that prior to its eventual downfall, the McKinsey group evaluated Enron in an effort to understand the features that contributed to its success. The report concluded that Enron experienced such great heights of success because it recruited talent from the top universities, pursued excellence through competition (at the expense of professional development), trimmed the staff of mediocrity, and awarded creativity, drive, and dogged pursuit of excellence. Essentially, Enron believed in the power of sheer talent as the central driver of organizational success. It found no need to build up, develop, or improve, when highly talented (though under-trained) individuals

were already resolutely pursuing excellence. The fate of Enron is well known—it imploded. What does this tell us about change in American school systems?

Michael Fullan (2008, 2011), David Kirp (2013), and Diane Ravitch (2010), three scholars of school reform, made reference in recent books to Gladwell's essay on the implosion of Enron. They make the point that large-scale, sustainable change in schools occurs incrementally, which is in direct contrast with the American expectation for talented individuals to produce immediate turnaround. As seen with Enron's eventual implosion, organizations do not thrive on speed and talent alone. Instead, the process of development must unfold over time if it is to be sustained. Fullan (2008) argues, "Individual stars do not make a sky; the system does" (p. 65).

The star qualities possessed by key personnel that helped Enron to rise, and arguably contributed to its downfall, are currently being demanded of public school leaders. Public school districts are pressured to move toward offering school choice options. Star teachers are touted with their individual classroom successes, but extraordinary teaching is difficult to sustain. This approach to effective teaching is at odds with research findings that point to capacity building as the driver of the incremental process of change. How, then, are educators to respond to these demands? How do societal and political pressures shape the way school districts attempt change? How do district leaders balance these pressures with the need to build capacity? What role does organizational culture play in bridging external demands and how does ideology affect change in schools? These are a few of the questions examined in this study.

Research problem

Various distinct policy agendas have influenced American expectations for educational reform. These agendas include the increasing role of federal involvement in public education, the privatization of schools, the improvement of teacher training and education, and the testing and accountability measures that set certain expectations for school performance. Underlying these different agendas is the same basic premise that public schools do not meet American expectations of excellence. Firestone (1989) explains that there are two major categories of policy tools used to elicit reform: behavior inducements and mandates. Inducements provide incentives and financial means in order for the unit in question to make the desired change. Mandates are used to achieve a uniform effect across many entities by "establishing a standard, inspecting performance, and punishing those who fail to comply with the standard" (Firestone, 1989, p. 152). These mandates and inducements occur legitimately because public schools are under government jurisdiction; however, just a cursory glance at the effect of the traditional policy tools reveals that they are not producing the desired effect. Ultimately, these policy mandates have created a climate of political pressure that culminates in the demand for school reform through hasty decision-making, high stakes accountability systems, and uncertainty. In the presence of this pressure, how are school districts able to respond with strides toward positive change?

Statement of Purpose

In the most general sense, the purpose of this study is to unearth the complexity of meaningful change in public schools. This study sought to better understand this

complexity through district leaders' perceptions about the effects of district organizational culture and political discourse on public education. Through the accounts of four individuals who lead the district, this study sought to understand how one mid-sized, urban public school district moves through a process of change in light of the internal organizational culture and the external political context. This study is informed by literature about meaningful school reform, the context in which meaningful school reform must take place, the organizational role of the district central office in mediating the effect the context has on the implementation of reform, and the research on organizational culture—specifically the role of language as a powerful force in shaping meaningful change.

This study is filtered through a conceptual framework that takes into account what Andrew Pettigrew (1997) has delineated as the three primary elements of change: the context in which change occurs, the language used to enact change, and the actual process of change.

Based on the assumptions that meaningful change is both personal and contextual, this study is case-specific. Meaningful change is also dependent upon the individuals who design, discuss, and implement it; and finally, meaningful change is language-specific. In the narrowest sense, the purpose of this study is to examine how context affects ideological content of district leadership as it enacts change.

Research Questions

1. How do district leaders perceive the external social and political environment?
2. How do district leader perceptions of the external environment affect beliefs about the district's ability to go through a process of change?

3. How do district leaders communicate their beliefs about the effects that the external environment has on the district's ability to go through a process of change?
    a. To each other in cabinet
    b. To principals and teachers
    c. To the school board
    d. To parents
    e. To the media
4. How do district leaders perceive the internal social political structural environment of the district?
5. How do those perceptions of internal context affect district leader beliefs about the ability to change?
6. What is the ideology espoused by district leaders?
7. How do the beliefs of internal and external context shape district leader ideology?
8. How do district leaders perceive change in the district?

Definition of terms

The terms used are informed by Pettigrew's work (1979, 1987, 1997), but modified for this study.

<u>*Context*</u>: *Outer context* includes the economic, social, political, competitive, and sectorial environments in which the organization is located; this study is mostly concerned with the political environment shaped by state-level politics. *Inner context*

refers to the inner mosaic of the organization: the structural, cultural, and political environments found within the bounds of the school district.

Process of change: a sequence of events, actions, and activities that incrementally create large-scale meaningful change within the organization of the school district. It is a state of continuous, high-level school improvement.

Ideological Content or *Ideology*: A set of beliefs about the social world and how it operates, containing statements about the rightness of certain social arrangements and what action would be undertaken in the light of those statements (Pettigrew, 1979).

Limitations of Study

Inherent in ethnography is the limitation of the investigator as the primary research instrument; while this limitation is addressed in detail in the method chapter, it merits consideration at this initial point of the study. As the primary instrument, the investigator carries biases that stem from both previous life experience and from field experience in which the investigator is both a participant and an observer. The field experience, in this case the participant observation of a public school district executive cabinet causes the investigator to get close to the data, the data become personal. The objectivity of the research may suffer from this personal attachment to the data. However, this closeness to the data is also the strength of ethnography, as the data are lent to deep, rich—albeit personal—analysis. In the method chapter these biases are addressed.

Another limitation of this study is that it is based on a single case. The data and findings are collected and distilled from one mid-sized urban public school district. The

purpose of research is to generate knowledge for the greater body of literature; how can the findings of one single case, which cannot be generalized, advance the body of literature? Again this limitation can also be viewed as a strength: If multiple cases were studied, the richness of data would be lost. The findings from this single case—while not generalizable—are valuable to the larger body of research because they bring to the fore the nuances of the particular.

Another potential limitation is the question of informed consent. The gatekeeper for this study is the superintendent of the school district under study. He holds influence over all the other individuals who participated in the study. While informed consent was procured from all the participants, there is the question of their unfettered free-will in the decision to participate.

The process of change being studied in this dissertation is only getting underway, if this study spanned the next ten years, far more fruitful conclusions could be drawn from the findings. If the investigator interviewed principals, teachers, parents, reporters, even students—the conclusions drawn from the findings would arguably be much more fruitful. In defense of the decision to largely draw from the accounts of four executive cabinet members, the scope of this study is not to look at every perspective of every role group involved with the process of change over the span of the next ten years. Instead, the scope of this study is to examine district leadership perceptions about the external and internal contexts and how those perceptions help them to create language—specifically and ideology—intended to move the district through a process of meaningful change. The data garnered for this study do, in fact, yield findings that permit relevant conclusions to be drawn.

Overview of Dissertation

Conclusions drawn about the role of ideology in bridging the context with the implementation of meaningful change were informed by the findings of this single case study. Data collected by observations, interviews, and documents from the executive cabinet of Greenfield Public Schools provided findings in response to eight research questions. These eight research questions were drawn from a conceptual framework based on Andrew Pettigrew's (1997) study of process in which he claims that there are three key elements in the examination of a process of change (context, ideological content, and process of change). The conceptual framework and purpose of study grew out of the initial research problem. The initial research problem posed the issue of whether or not a public school district can actually create meaningful reform in the current political climate which demands reform.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Change in Schools

What do we know about school change? Actually, a vast body of literature is devoted to the phenomenon (Fullan, 1991, 2001; Firestone, 1989; Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1989; Louis & Miles, 1990; Cuban 1988; Hess, 1999; Murphy, 1991; Hall, 1987; Knapp, 2008; Ellsworth, 2000; Sullivan, 2005; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001; Elmore,1988, 2004; Sarason, 1990, 1996; Supovitz, 2006; Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan & Hopkins, 2010; Spillane & Seashore Louis, 2005). The literature includes a variety of focal points linking educational change to theories of leadership, policy, organization, sociology, and technology. This chapter includes literature written about meaningful change in schools, the context in which meaningful change in schools must occur, the role of the school district in implementing meaningful change in schools, and the use of culture, specifically language as the essence of culture, as a conduit to produce change.

Change is not necessarily progress or improvement. Both Fullan (1991) and Cuban (1988) warn that there are times when improvement is made by resisting change. Changes do not necessarily produce solutions. Hess (2011) noted that although many education reforms have occurred, it appears that very little change has actually been produced. Similarly, Sarason (1982) concluded, "in regard to educational change in schools…the more things change the more they remain the same" (p. 90). By the same token, Elmore (2004) argues that educators are rewarded for exercising copious amounts of "change," but that change has little effect on measurable learning improvements. Arguing that change is partially a question of semantics, Elmore (2004)

continues, “Change has a clear meaning only in an instrumental sense—change that *leads* to improvements in human capacity” (p. 219).

Change is not produced by the rhetoric of reform or even when reform policies are passed into law (Sarason, 1990). Hess (1999) argued that policymakers only add to the confusion when they recognize public dissatisfaction with school performance. Reform fascination provides the appearance of change being created, when in fact, very little, if any improvement may actually occur. The reform rhetoric maintains “spinning wheels” or “policy churn” as Hess (1999) claims. Elmore (2004) echoes Hess’ concept of policy churn explaining that policy becomes a means for lawmakers to create new standards, increase testing time, raise the stakes for students, and threaten failing schools with adverse consequences. At the same time, practitioners employ their own product of “change” by teaching to the test, expanding instructional time rather than content, and gaming the accountability system. It is through this symbiotic relationship between educators and politicians—a reform rhetoric standstill—that educators and politicians are able to change a great deal, but improve little. Both the politicians and the practitioners benefit by operating in a “mutually and tacitly acknowledged zone of ignorance” of what accounts for actual improvement (Elmore, 2004, p. 218).

As part of the belief that policies create change, the accountability measures, standardized tests, and data use mandated by various laws are wrongly viewed as both a means and an end to school reform and change. George Madaus (1985) observed, “Testing is the darling of policymakers across the country” (p. 5). Robert Linn (1993) explained that it is naïve for policymakers to expect standardized test scores to serve as an impartial gauge of educational quality and as an indicator of true change in schools.

The test results can be emphasized in different ways to meet the interests of different policy agendas (Linn, 1993). Tests are not just being used as a gauge of educational conditions; they are also viewed as instruments of reform, thus serving both as a means and end to positive change (Linn, 1993). The assumption underlying the policy focus on accountability, one of the most referenced changes in education, is that high standards and assessments paired with rewards and sanctions will motivate schools, teachers, and students to work harder. This assumption is in stark contrast with motivation research that suggests that punishments and rewards provide only superficial and short-term motivation (Pink, 2009; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The use of accountability measures, standardized tests, or data in a classroom, school, district, state, or even across the country does not equal change or improvement.

So, then, what *is* educational change? Fullan (1991) breaks down the process into three major components across four phases: change in materials, change in teaching approach, and change in beliefs. For change to actually occur, it must take place in practice. A change in belief is the most difficult to plan and pursue because it requires challenging implicit core values (Fullan, 1991). A shared understanding of educational change, what it is for, and how it can be pursued, is the key to developing progressive change in schools (Fullan, 1991). This shared meaning stands as a barrier to the kind of empty change that takes place without fruitful improvements.

Fullan's (1991) components reflect change as a process, not an event (Fullan, 1991; Hall & Loucks, 1977). One change model that reflects the processual nature of organizational change is the teleological approach which describes four phases of implementation in some manner similar to the following (March & Simon, 1958;

Etzioni, 1963; March & Olsen, 1976; Chakravarthy & Lorange, 1991; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995): Phase I is initiation, it is the process that leads up to the decision of whether or not to move forward with a change. Phase II is implementation: the first experiences of attempting to put a change into practice. Phase III is continuation, which refers to whether or not the change is routinized. The last phase, Phase IV is the outcome. Fullan (1991) cautions readers not to be fooled into thinking the four phases compose a simple linear process. He explains that there are many variables that can have an effect at each phase, including the scope of the process and the time it takes for each phase to take place. Additionally, the boundaries between the phases are not fixed: for example, implementation and continuation may not be distinct in practice. Datnow and Park (2009) and Darling-Hammond (2005) agree that change is not a linear, top-down process in which fidelity to implementation plans creates successful reform; instead, meaningful change occurs through a bi-directional process which is neither predominantly top-down nor bottom-up.

The point is that meaningful change is not a simple, smooth process that can be easily depicted by boxes and arrows. Rather, meaningful change occurs when complexity is teased out and when the effort is made to build shared understanding around the change; when meaningful change does take place—it is more often than not a very slow, developing phenomenon. In fact, change in schools may occur so incrementally that it almost seems as if no change is occurring at all. Elmore (1991) suggests that the good schools "aren't very innovative; indeed their main strength often seems to be that they persist in, and develop increasingly deep understandings of well-developed theories of teaching and learning" (p.45). This statement does not imply that

good schools aren't changing; it suggests that they allow shared meaning to emerge slowly, organically and incrementally. "School improvements—if they are real—occur incrementally, as a result of sustained effort over years" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 137).

Schools where actual changes take hold, are concerned less with visible, trendy, shiny reforms and more with the concentrated work of developing conditions that improve teaching and learning. Kirp (2013) demonstrates that incremental nature of change in his case study titled, *Improbable Scholars*. This is a narrated case study in which David Kirp takes a candid look at what occurs in one school district in New Jersey facing demands for reform. Taking a system wide approach, he observes at the classroom, school, and district administrative levels, and sets his observations against the backdrop of a political environment that has significant effects on the decisions and actions of district leaders and teachers. This district is pocked with poverty and threats of drastic changes coming from "above," and yet it has continued to plug along; it has persistently stayed afloat in dangerous waters. Kirp wanted to explore what it was about this district that gave it staying power.

Kirp's (2013) conclusions parallel the argument that change in schools is incremental. Kirp argued that even when it looks like there is nothing special happening; good "stuff" is probably taking place. Few of the teachers and principals he observed were "lighting the world on fire," instead they were devoted to their work, they found purpose in their jobs, and they were driven to do the best they could in every situation. When describing one educator who re-designed the district curriculum, Kirp writes, "Fred's approach to problem-solving was cemented into the school system. It is an organization—a system, not a cult of personality—that Union City has constructed,

and this commitment to continuous improvement is essential to its success" (Kirp, 2013, p. 89).

Incremental behavior cannot be transformed into a program implemented with fidelity. Rather, the behavior and tasks are situation-specific. Kirp (2013) explained that what worked in Miss Bossbaly's fourth grade classroom was a completely different style from what worked in Mrs. Emmerling's fourth grade classroom, which was just down the hall. Similarly, one district administrator warned superintendents from other nearby districts that "Miracles can't get duplicated, but the approach that we took here can be used elsewhere" (Kirp, 2013, p. 87). The following describes what the superintendent at Union City will do when he is asked what accomplishments of which he's proudest. The Union City superintendent will:

> …tell you about two things—the school system's blueprint…and its homegrown assessments of student performance. There's nothing in this recital that will earn headlines or bring a president to town, but it's the sort of incrementalism that can keep a successful enterprise humming (Kirp, 2013, p. 91).

The slow, "humming" Kirp describes above, goes against the trends of urgently implementing new programs with fidelity which pervade the discourse on education reform.

Kirp's (2013) case study makes the case for moving away from radical reform toward reform which takes place because of hard work by "regular" people who take their work seriously. It is a case for supporting the resources and people currently in place, and developing those who are dedicated to doing the job right. When one state

evaluator was asked her opinion on Union City's status she said, "Compared to the state's review two years earlier, when nothing was going on, you can feel the change" (Kirp, 2013, p. 96). Kirp concludes, "It's no miracle, but it embodies the kind of slow and steady improvement Union City has built its strategy upon" (p. 96).

Meaningful change in schools is not easily accomplished. One could look at Kirp's study and conclude that the passage of time itself creates progress. However, Seymour Sarason (1990) specifically states that the passage of time, alone, does not manifest meaningful change. What makes meaningful change so difficult to attain is that it often involves an "unlearning" of customs, traditions, and research that have been taught educators as being right (Sarason, 1990, p. 101). This unlearning is really a feature of the culture and belief systems that are embedded in the American education tradition. Meaningful change upsets the status quo; it shakes up implicit values and traditions. Addressing cultural elements takes time. Time paired with purpose is a condition that begs for committed leadership and sound theory. Sarason (1990) writes:

> I have seen scores of educational policymakers who had what they thought was a good idea, or said they would support someone who did, who left it to less powerful or less knowledgeable or less committed people to initiate and sustain the implementation process. (p. 105)

If leaders fail to commit to the reform, the implementation inevitably also fails. Commitment and involvement of leadership is a key piece to creating meaningful change. Fullan (2011) asserts that the effective change leader actively participates as a learner in helping the organization to improve. Fullan (2001) delineates five components that leaders can use to help create meaningful change: pursue moral

purpose, understand the change process, develop relationships, foster knowledge building, and strive for coherence. Each of these components is easy enough to understand, but it is in the doing that they become powerful: practicing these components in tandem is the challenge and the goal, because singularly, not one can stand alone and be enough to direct meaningful change.

Change is also difficult to achieve because it takes patience, extensive knowledge, and the organization of the time and knowledge into a working conceptual framework. Meaningful change requires more than token participation from those involved; it requires personal commitment and this entails patience on the part of change leaders. Sarason (1990) argues that while school reformers are often focused on arbitrary pre-determined time goals, they should instead practice patience, allowing social and institutional realities to drive the timeframe. Patience in leadership involves being able to see beyond the immediate time frame. Fink and Hargreaves (2006) see sustainable leadership as necessary for change, defining it as a means to "preserve and develop deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefit for others around us, now and in the future" (p. 37). Educational leaders need theory to make sense of the ideas, interconnections between ideas, and the emphasis placed on them. Theory provides a "framework in the present that has a past and a future direction" (Sarason, 1990, p. 122). So, meaningful change does not occur just because it takes a long time, or just because of vast knowledge about reform--it requires a theory to organize the time and effort in a way that advances the improvement beyond one "good" leader.

In summary, change in schools is complex. It takes time to achieve. It has multiple dimensions; it occurs under the influence of sound theory and shared meaning. It takes commitment from a leader who is willing to do hard work. Change is not achieved just by passing laws, implementing policies and mandates. It is not achieved through mere rhetoric, even when it is theory-driven. Change is not the successful implementation of a program; it is not created by putting in place data-driven accountability systems. While there are many obstacles to meaningful change in schools, there is evidence that it is possible to attain.

Effect of American Politics and Culture on Schools in the Last 50 Years

Why do we need change in American public schools? To answer this question it is necessary to examine the cultural and political changes that have affected American public education. This section reviews the evolution of the federal government's role in regulating public education, the school choice debate, the philanthropic interest in education policy, and the erosion of the teaching profession.

Federal Government's Role in Regulating Public Education

Although there is no federal provision for public education in the American Constitution, over the past fifty years the legitimacy of federal involvement in public education has increased with the passage of legislation expanding the federal role in schools and classrooms across the country. Arguably, the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 has led to the most significant federal intrusion in what teachers teach, and the consequences imposed upon schools that fail to achieve annual

objectives. NCLB changed the calculus of school improvement from merely equalizing inputs to holding schools accountable for test scores. The following discussion reviews the period leading up to NCLB, the implications, and the arguments of some experts who look beyond the aftermath of NCLB to see what lies in the future of American public school systems.

Since the mid-1960's federal legislation for public education has increased. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965; it provided funds to encourage states to move toward the policy directions set in motion by Congress. In 1964, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act established means by which the federal government could remove funds if states refused to desegregate schools. These mandates and inducements set the stage for the federal government to oversee state and local educational policy. How have these policies affected the American expectation for school performance?

In 1983, *A Nation At Risk,* a report of the National Commission on the Excellence in Education under President Reagan, was released. Diane Ravitch (2010) argues that contemporary education reforms trace back to this report which concluded that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people…other [nations] are matching and surpassing our educational attainments" (NAR, 1983). After this report was released, federal legislation and initiatives were passed with the goal to improve educational standards and hold schools accountable for student performance on standardized tests. Most of the laws following *A Nation At Risk* sought to increase course requirements for graduation, increase testing requirements, increase the ways in

which student performance data were used, set new curriculum guidelines and require new management processes for schools (Darling-Hammond, 1992).

In 2001 the ESEA was re-authorized as NCLB; this legislation regulated what educational activities would receive federal funding and it created an accountability system based on standardized tests and consequences for schools not reaching set proficiency targets. NCLB requires that states adopt uniform instructional standards, develop tests to monitor student performance, engage in annual testing, and publicly report test results. NCLB mandated that states penalize schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward a goal of 100% of all students demonstrating proficiency in reading, science, and math by 2014. These federal policies snowballed into an extensive system of mandates at state and local levels.

When President Obama began addressing education policy, he and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan criticized NCLB for lowering standards and applying faulty approaches for measuring school performance (Manna & Ryan, 2011). Race to the Top is a result of the Obama administration's belief that educational success is more likely to occur if state governments established an overarching reform strategy that is supported with federal dollars. One of the goals of Race to the Top is to help provide that strategy (Manna & Ryan, 2011). In order for state governments to receive funds via Race to the Top (RTTT), they need to demonstrate that they are committed to adopting internationally benchmarked standards and tests, building data systems that accurately measure student performance and are used to inform instructional practices, increasing teacher effectiveness, and turning around the lowest achieving schools (Manna & Ryan, 2011). The design of the RTTT legislation is based on allocating

federal funding for schools through a competitive grant process rather than on the basis of automatic funding via need-based formulas (McGuinn, 2011). RTTT is the most recent major federal program aimed at producing school reform.

The heightened focus on standardized tests are a result of the federal involvement in education policy. Tests are a form of accountability; but because these words get tossed about so frequently, it is pertinent to explore what school accountability actually is and what standardized tests are actually doing. Accountability systems are the ways by which educators "give an account of their actions to someone in a position of formal authority, inside or outside the school" (Elmore, 2004, p. 140). Accountability systems can be internal to schools, for example, a principal holding teachers accountable for their lesson plan schedules; or external to schools, for example, school districts requiring schools to create handbooks that are compatible with state policy. Accountability systems may be formal or informal or low-stakes or high stakes. In order for accountability systems to work, the collective expectations, individual responsibility, and accountability mechanisms must be aligned (Elmore, 2004).

Policy-makers have used accountability measures as a way to regulate reform. Linn (2000) explains that there are four reasons why policymakers use standardized tests as a reform agent. First, tests and assessments are relatively inexpensive; second, tests are relatively easy to externally mandate; third, tests can be rapidly implemented; and fourth, test results can have high visibility (Linn, 2000). Darling-Hammond (1991) expressed concern for the focus on standardized tests as a means for reform. She explained that the tests used are not meant to support or enhance classroom instruction; rather they are created by commercial publishers and non-school agencies with the

intent of ranking students through a streamlined, efficient way (Darling-Hammond, 1991, p. 221). If these tests were used as only one source of information about student learning, their shortcomings would be less problematic, but because they are used to make important decisions concerning student graduation, retention, and even teacher effectiveness, they arguably have many detrimental effects (Darling-Hammond, 1991).

Wiggins (1989) asks, "Just what are tests meant to do? Whose purpose do they serve? Are large-scale testing programs necessary? When are tests that are designed to monitor accountability harmful to the educational process? Need they be so intrusive?" (p. 81). These questions highlight the issues of school accountability measures as they lack the alignment of collective expectations and individual responsibility that Elmore discusses. If accountability is based on the idea of giving a truthful account of what transpires in a classroom, then the current focus on standardized tests wants for the depth of analysis that would accurately demonstrate what happens in schools. Wiggins (1989) writes, "A genuine test of intellectual achievement doesn't merely check standardized work in a mechanical way" (p. 82).

How then have standardized tests affected American expectations for reform? They highlight issues of inequity in schools, but they also highlight issues of wrongful attachment of policy to student learning. A culture of high stakes accountability has emerged in schools, as evidenced by the stress of testing season. Because student performance on tests is used to make policy decisions, the implications for school accountability systems based on assessment is brought to a public awareness.

Just as federal involvement in public education has increased, so too has the power and influence of private interests. The school improvement industry is a billion dollar a year market and it is dominated by corporations, consultants, and foundations (Rowan, 2002). In many respects, the private influence has had as much, if not more, influence over the educational system than the federal government. School choice is one way the private and public sectors are reshaping public education. The privatization of education in the form of school choice has affected the American educational landscape and should be considered in a discussion of the environment surrounding public education.

The School Choice Debate

How did school choice emerge in the American political landscape? School choice has its roots in school desegregation. States encouraged the creation of private schools to accommodate white students who did not want to go to an integrated school (Ravitch, 2010). For example, the state of Virginia gave tuition grants to students to attend a private school of their choosing. In 1980, when President Reagan was elected, the issue of school choice entered into mainstream discourse concerning education. Reagan viewed choice as a fundamental piece of local control as he advocated an agenda of freedom, deregulation, and market-based solutions influenced by Milton Friedman's ideas of individual freedom (Ravitch, 2010). In the 1990's three forms of school choice emerged: voucher schools, privately-managed schools, and charter schools (Ravitch, 2010). All three forms of choice receive federal funding and all three are privately run. Voucher schools are private schools in which students receive a voucher that covers a part of their tuition. Privately-managed schools are public schools

operated by a for-profit or non-profit organization in contract with the local school district. Charter schools are managed by a non-profit or for-profit agency that is chartered by the state to meet performance standards in exchange for autonomy from the state after a trial period usually of five years.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, school choice has remained at the forefront of the education policy debate. Proponents argue that school choice is the best way toward "customer satisfaction" (Wells, Slayton & Scott, 2002). In this case, customer (students and families) satisfaction would be achieved through competition. As more families choose to take their students out of public schools, it is reasoned, public schools will strive to improve. School choice stays true to the tenants of a free-market society which values the liberty of individuals to decide what works best for them. Diversity of choice promotes parental liberty to decide the best education option for their child (Gill, Tempane, Ross & Brewer, 2001). School choice proponents also argue that poor and minority students often get lost in the mix at a public school, whereas properly designed charter schools benefit poor and minority students because they focus specifically on their needs (Gill, Tempane, Ross & Brewer, 2001).

Other research contradicts the claimed benefits of school choice. When charter schools get outstanding results, critics question whether they enroll a fair share of needy students. Buckley and Schneider (2007) found that charter schools in Washington D.C. do, in fact, enroll smaller numbers of high-needs students compared to public schools. Specifically, English Language Learners were under-represented in twenty-eight of thirty-seven charter schools, and Special Education students were under-represented in twenty-four of the thirty-seven schools. Zimmer et al. (2008) found that Philadelphia

charter school students did not make statistically significant performance gains as compared to traditional public schools. The same study found that the local public schools were not performing any differently due to competition from the local charter school.

Other findings reveal that when charters are successful, they are very successful, including with under-privileged students. KIPP schools often outperform their neighboring public schools (Ravitch, 2010). Students who stay at a KIPP school for four or more years generally achieve standardized test improvements. Ravitch (2010) attributes much of this success to the structure of the school day. She describes the long hours and strict discipline codes as reminiscent of schools in the 1940s. So if this is a model that works, why aren't public schools working to replicate these conditions? Ravitch (2010) provides one argument:

> Public schools have to accept everyone who applies…public schools can't throw out the kids who do not work hard or the kids who have many absences or the kids who are disrespectful or the kids whose parents are absent and inattentive. They have to find ways to educate even those students who don't want to be there. That's the dilemma of public education (p. 136).

There is undeniably an ideological rift in public debate surrounding school choice. Buckley and Schneider (2007) explain concerning charters that "even the most basic descriptions are often infused with hype. In turn, the creation of charter schools has become more than a reform; it has become a movement" (p. 267). Those who are against school choice view it as a means to undermine public education. As proponents

and opponents of school choice continue to debate its merits, there is no doubt that this debate has increased public awareness of the challenges facing public schools. Likewise, the debate shapes the political landscape so that calls for school reform continue.

Philanthropic Interest in Education Policy

Another major feature of the American political and cultural context that has affected the educational debate is the involvement of philanthropic groups. Since the days of Andrew Carnegie, education has been a focus of philanthropic development. Up until the early 21st century, philanthropies generally took hands-off approach to funding educational interests. Even in the mid-1990's, when the Annenberg Challenge was introduced, the foundation set parameters for proposals and then reviewed them without setting an agenda (Ravitch, 2010). By 2002, the three top foundations contributing to education reform began changing the process for philanthropic support.

The interests of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, and the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation began shifting in their support of education reform strategies. Ravitch (2010) argues that these foundations approached school reform through a similar structure and process by which they built successful companies. She argues that their approach "mirrored their own experience in acquiring huge fortunes such as competition, choice, deregulation, incentives, and other market-based approaches [that] were not familiar in the world of education where high value is placed on collaboration" (p. 200). Ravitch goes on to suggest that these foundations have an agenda; these foundations know what they want to accomplish and how it

should be done. Ravitch warns that when the wealthiest foundations are joined in common goals their power extends past public accountability.

Ravitch (2010) argues that the Gates Foundation seeks to direct state and national policy in education by giving grants to almost every major think tank and advocacy group in the field; this spread of influence leaves little room for critical thought. The Broad Foundation supports competition, choice, deregulation, and tight management. The Walton Family Foundation also employs a privatized view of education as it seeks to create and promote alternatives to public schools. As argued above, the research, policy advocacy, and school choice options funded by giant philanthropies have had an effect on the American landscape concerning education reform. How public schools work respond to these funders with large circles of influence is an important aspect of contemporary school reform.

The Erosion of the Teaching Profession

Over the last fifty years, even within the last thirty years, the teaching profession has undergone changes; these changes are another feature of the American cultural fabric which has affected public education. First, some remarks on semantics: a profession claims an area of expertise. It is expertise that makes a profession more than just a "job." Often accompanying expertise is some degree of prestige and material benefit. Experts have knowledge and skills of value and are therefore rewarded in the marketplace of power and wealth. Bureaucratization undermines expertise as described by Gerald Bell (1967). He explains that enabling worker discretion through structural flexibility is more efficient for complex organizations than controlling work through

formal structures. Formal structures add an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy when experts are capable of effective decision-making. The complexities involved in an unpredictable work environment are most efficiently addressed by free exchange of knowledge between professionals. As professionals apply expertise to unpredictable situations, they create a work environment conducive to greater creativity and innovation without an additional level of administrative regimentation. Teaching is a profession that requires a college degree, knowledge and skills to navigate an environment of unpredictability, and is complex work. However, the rewards of a profession, prestige and competitive compensation, however, are largely absent. As Lortie (1975) remarked, "Fame and fortune are rarely the lot of the classroom teacher" (p.103). Studies show the dismal salaries granted to teachers (Figlio, 1997; Firestone, 1994; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007). Arguably, within the last thirty years, the status of teaching has declined, and there are several possible reasons for this.

Since the 1980's, Darling-Hammond has been predicting the demise of the teaching profession. In 1984, she wrote about the "Coming Crisis in Teaching." Many contemporary concerns with teacher quality and recruitment were first being noticed during this period. Darling-Hammond was concerned about projected shortages of qualified teachers. She explained that, unless policies began to restructure schools, the decline in teacher quality would truly become a crisis. Citing data from the late 1970s, she pointed out that new teachers were being recruited from the bottom group of SAT scorers (Darling-Hammond, 1984). Darling-Hammond (1984) expressed her concern with the high demand for math and science teachers and the low rates of college of education graduates specializing in math and science (in 1981, fewer than 1,400

Bachelor's degrees were awarded in math and science education, combined). Compared with the 18,000 math and science teachers who left their positions, it was obvious that the supply would fall short of the demand.

Darling-Hammond (1984) also pointed to dismal teaching salaries. In 1984, beginning salaries for teachers were lower than those in nearly any other field that required a bachelor's degree (Darling-Hammond, 1984). Additionally, teacher salaries reached their ceiling much quicker than in other fields (Darling-Hammond, 1984). How does poor pay affect school improvement? In current research, Pink (2009) writes that fifty years of social science explains that extrinsic rewards that embody the philosophy of "If you do this, then you get that" – works well for simple, routine work, but does not motivate individuals who need to complete complex, innovative tasks. Pink (2009) explains that because teaching is creative and complex, tying merit pay to teacher performance ignores this strong evidence. However, compensation is still important. Just because extrinsic motivators do not work for completion of tasks that require expertise doesn't mean that rewards, such as competitive salaries are ineffective (Pink, 2009). Pink (2009) explains that paying individuals unfairly is extremely demotivating. And, of course, low salaries can deter some people from pursuing certain professions. Therefore, the best use of money as a motivator, at least for complex work, is to compensate people fairly, i.e. pay healthy base salaries—pay teachers enough that compensation is no longer an issue (Pink, 2009).

In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future released a report titled, *What Matters Most*. President Clinton endorsed the report ensuring that the US Department of Education supported states and districts in their response to the

report's recommendations (Darling-Hammond, 2000). This was the first time that concerns about the quality of teaching and teacher education became part of the mainstream dialogue (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The basic premise of the report (1996) was that "a caring competent and qualified teacher for every child is the most important ingredient in education reform," therefore, Americans need to invest in ensuring quality teachers (p. 10). Per the recommendations of the report, Clinton's budget for the 1998 fiscal year called for major investment in teacher education, this included funding for 100,000 teachers to pursue National Board Certification (Darling-Hammond, 2000). *What Matters Most* identified a number of barriers to achieving educational improvement tied to the decline of teacher quality. These included flaws in teacher preparation, careless recruitment, inadequate training, lack of professional development, and unenforced standards for educators ("What Mattters Most, Teaching for America's Future," 1996, report).

Since the release of *What Matters Most*, there has been an effort to establish a better system of ensuring teacher quality. The agenda to professionalize teaching is linked to the K-12 curriculum standards movement (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). Several organizations and philanthropies are involved and invested in the movement. These include the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards, the Carnegie Corporation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Ford Foundation (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). These power players have joined forces to help develop a consistent approach to teacher education that is based on high standards from undergraduate education to the continuous professional development of teachers.

Systems-wide Reform Approach as a Response to Political/Cultural Context

Consequently, some scholars have turned to a different school reform approach, a systems-wide approach (Reigeluth & Garfinkle, 1994; Fullan, 2001; Supovitz, 2006; Harris & Chrispeels, year). The basic premise of systems-wide education reform is that positive change occurs when the *whole system* works together to move forward. Instead of focusing reform efforts on a certain reform agenda, policy tool, or geographical area, the focus becomes how each of these parts together can help achieve school improvement across the board. Actual improvement is seen as dependent on system components, from Federal policies to classroom routines.

On an abstract level, systems theory explains problem situations through its "interconnected, interdependent, interacting, and internally consistent ideas manifested in the design solution" (Banathy, 1994, p. 28). The essential quality of a single part of a system rests in its relationship and contribution to the whole system (Banathy, 1994). Applied to education reform, systems theory looks at the interconnections between the federal and state role and the district and school role in supporting the improvement of teaching and learning. It strives to move the whole system toward the outcome of improved schools (Supovitz, 2006).

A key feature of system-wide educational reform is the notion of "scaling-up," because the effort is made to affect change broadly. Chrispeels and Gonzalez (2006) explain that in order "to scale up change and reach many more schools that are in need of reform, change has to be enacted simultaneously at multiple levels of schooling: district, school, classroom…" (p. 243). Systems-wide reform involves a shift in

thinking from simple top-down leadership to a more complex understanding of leadership as distributed. Coburn (2003) provides "dimensions of scale" as a conceptual improvement over narrowly defining "scaling up" as simply increasing the number of schools affected. Dimensions of scale include: spread, depth, and sustainability (Coburn, 2003). *Spread* refers to paths by which reform is spread through new norms and principles and therefore becomes embedded in the culture. *Depth* can be thought of like a "fractal, which refers to any pattern that reveals greater complexity as it is enlarged" (Coburn, 2003, p. 6). *Sustainability* is often discussed in systems-wide reform, but Coburn argues that it should be considered in conjunction with scale because scaling up doesn't really occur unless it happens in a sustained way.

This systems-wide approach to understanding change makes the argument for focusing inquiry on the role of the school district in education reform. Districts are the middle component, the link between reform policy at the national and state levels and reform implementation at the school and classroom levels (Supovitz, 2006). School districts have a mediating influence on reform implementation (Anderson & Togneri, 2005; Spillane, 1996, 1998; Corcoran, Fuhrman & Belcher, 2001). If a systems-wide approach requires that the whole system moves forward, more or less in tandem, then the mediating role of the school district seems a most reasonable focus for study.

Critics of school district authority see it as an out-moded structural relic, pointing to the streamlined governance of public education in modern European countries (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Doyle & Finn, 1984). They claim that local control does not actually exist. Doyle and Finn (1984) argue that school districts are "subordinate administrative units of a state educational system with some residual

power to modify statewide regulations and procedure in order to ease their implementation …and with the residual authority to supplement state spending" (p. 90). As states play a more aggressive role in setting standards and monitoring school performance, it does seem that district functioning may be obsolete.

Elmore (1993) argues that the role of district authority is anything but archaic; in fact, as states create school policies, it is district interpretation of policy implementation that essentially helps or hinders school improvement. He describes the importance of district authority as it provides a means of mobilizing political support for schools at the level of most immediate effect, essentially, districts can buffer against state and national policy shifts that are inconsistent with local preferences (Elmore, 1993).

Other research has laid claim to the argument that the district role is important for school reform. Berman and McLaughlin (1977) found that the degree of implementation and institutionalization of innovation was higher in districts that approached change with a problem-solving orientation. Rosenholtz (1989) found that more effective classrooms in terms of ongoing teacher learning and improving student performance were prevalent in districts with priority given to support for teaching and learning, Murphy and Hallinger (1988) found that district effectiveness was associated with the focus of district administration on instruction, teacher improvement, goals for student performance, a curriculum aligned across the district, and systematic use of data for improvement-related decision making. These findings demonstrate that district level decisions can make a difference in the quality of teacher and student performance and in the implementation of change at the school level. It appears that districts do play an important role in creating change at the school level.

Districts help schools develop the capacity to achieve the goals of standards-driven reform (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Districts are able to provide resources for costly interventions like principal development and teacher mentoring programs (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Districts are uniquely positioned to facilitate awareness and diffusion of effective practices across schools in local jurisdictions (Resnick & Glennan, 2002). All of these findings provide evidence that as long as school districts exist, the implementation and effects of state reform policies will be inevitably mediated and influenced by district-level actions.

In sum, it is not enough for policy to mandate reform. Real change occurs when the whole system is working together to improve schools. School districts are the classic middle link between state and federal policy and classroom and school implementation. Thus, to gain a better understanding of just how districts affect change at the school level, this research will focus tightly on this process in a single district. It is pertinent to define the school district. In this piece the *district* refers to the central office administration rather than the whole complex system of interacting actors, unities, roles and purposes (Sykes, O'Day & Ford, 2009).

District Balance of External Demands and Internal Capacity-building

When taking a systems-wide view of change, district administration is the intermediary agent in the process. District administrators operate in the boundary between schools, state agencies, and the external community. How then, does district leadership respond to pressures for high student achievement in ways that build the internal capacity to improve teaching and learning? A review of recent research on

school reform at the district level shows that district leaders must balance both external expectations and internal capacity development. What do school districts actually do in their intermediary role? This section reviews the district role in managing the effects of the external environment and in building capacity for improvement within the whole school system.

External pressure for change and improvement does not have to be viewed as negative; it can function as a facilitator for improvement if leveraged correctly. District leaders can use these external polices to influence their own reform agenda. While traditional wisdom would claim that although most district leaders willingly comply with state and federal policy, many view the external policies as constraints (Bardach and Kagan, 1982), Firestone (1989) found, in contrast, that some districts view the policies as advantageous. District leaders may view the external pressures as means to meet their own reform agenda. District leaders may also lobby policymakers to influence the design of external demands (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). By complying with policy demands, districts can gain resources beyond the possible financial rewards of compliance (Elmore, 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999).

Honig and Hatch (2004) found that the multiple external demands on school systems are not inherently negative. These demands can force districts to find positive ways to respond to external demands for reform. The concept of "simplification systems" is useful in understanding how school districts manage external demands. A simplification system helps organizational actors make sense of external demands in ways that assist in organizational productivity (Honig & Hatch, 2004). A simplification system has a cognitive function and a structural function. Cognitively, the

simplification system helps organizational members translate complexity into comprehensible forms, which are then viewed as actionable items (March, 1994; Weick, 1995). The organizational members place new information from the external environment into familiar rules and decision frames. In other words, the simplification system "simplifies" new and unfamiliar ideas into recognizable forms. Simplification systems are also served by organizational structures. The structural side of the simplification system "provides a set of familiar and tangible activities that give concrete form to ambitious and complex reform approaches" (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Goals and strategies that are specific, yet open-ended enough that they can adapt over time are used as structural simplification systems (Honig & Hatch, 2004).

With a simplification system in place, Honig and Hatch (2004) explain that schools are better positioned to use goals and strategies to bridge and buffer external demands. Bridging occurs when an organization selectively engages external demands in order to enhance goal and strategy implementation (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Bridging policy demands can provide opportunities for schools to attract essential resources, to negotiate with stakeholders, and to promote innovation (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Buffering occurs when organizations make a strategic decision to engage with external demands in a limited way (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Buffering may include ignoring negative feedback from the external environment, limiting the influence of external demands by choosing not to participate, or creating alternative positive responses to negative external influences. While Honig and Hatch (2004) apply the concept of bridging and buffering to schools, it is arguably more appropriately applied to the

district level, as it is the district that spans the boundary between schools and external forces.

How do districts take the external information they have "simplified" and make it useful to schools? Honig and Hatch's (2004) concept of policy coherence explains the process by which external demands are linked to internal needs and mutually desired outcomes. Policy coherence is "a process of negotiation whereby school leaders and central office administrators continually craft the fit between external policy demands and schools' own goals and strategies and use the external demands strategically" (Honig & Hatch, 2004, p. 33). With effective simplification systems, district leaders can create policy coherence and build the internal capacity of school personnel to create positive change.

The role of district leaders is critical to school reform efforts in terms of building up internal capacity. They provide coordination to school reform efforts (Winfield, 1991, Cook et al, 1999; Haynes et al., 1998, Timar, 1989; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006). They set the tone for change, establish priorities and expectations, and allocate resources (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; McLaughlin, 1976; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006; Cooper et al., 1998). District leaders have influence over staff development (Spillane, 1996; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006). They can provide support to school change by giving value to reform efforts (Ross et al., 1997). It is under their guidance that school reform can be contained at the school level or scaled up to a district-wide scope (Bodilly & Berends, 1999; Cooper et al., 1998; McAdoo, 1998). They provide data that are important to reform efforts and communicate information in ways that support reform mechanisms (Spillane, 1996; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006).

Given the many ways districts shape and affect practices in schools, it is useful to organize their support for capacity building into elements of a framework designed by Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich (2008). Two major functions of a district seeking to build capacity for improvement are: 1) providing instructional leadership and 2) re-orienting the organization. For instructional leadership, Rorrer et al. (2008) argue that districts need to generate the will to reform and building the capacity to do so. It is important for districts to generate the will to reform so that practitioners are more likely to accept the new instructional guidance provided by the district. McLaughlin (1990) reflected:

> What matters most to policy outcomes are local capacity and will. The local expertise, organizational routines, and resources available to support planned change efforts generate fundamental differences in the ability of practitioners to plan, execute, or sustain an innovative effort. (p. 12-13)

Daresh (1991) expanded the link between will and instructional leadership noting that instructional leadership relies on the commitment to improve teaching and learning and commitment to the people with whom district leaders work. District instructional leadership relies on practitioners being engaged in all areas of instruction and leaders establishing the vision, focus and goals to support instruction (Bjork, 1993; Daresh, 1991). Generating the will to reform must be paired with building the capacity to do so.

Firestone (1989) defined capacity as the "wherewithal to actually implement [the decision]. The capacity to use reform is the extent to which the [school] has the

knowledge, skills, personnel, and other resources necessary to carry out decisions" (p.157). Berman (1986) suggested that the ability of the district to build capacity depends on the district's "managerial competence…the supportiveness of the organizational culture…and the difficulty of the problems facing the district" (p. 52). A study of nine districts by Spillane and Thompson (1997) found that a district's capacity to support instructional improvement is based on the ability to "learn the substantive ideas at the heart of the new reforms and to help teachers and others within the district learn these ideas" (p. 199). District instructional leaders build capacity by coordinating and aligning work of others through communication, planning and collaboration (Bjork, 1993; Daresh, 1991; Massel, 2000; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986). District leaders build capacity by monitoring goals, instruction, and efforts to improve instruction, including the meaningful use of data (Bjork, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986). Additionally, capacity is built by acquiring and targeting instructional support by securing social and fiscal capital (Bjork, 1993; Massel, 2000).

By providing instructional leadership, districts generate the will and build the capacity to reform. Another essential role districts play in creating the internal capacity to reform, according to Rorrer et al (2008), is re-orienting the organization. They (2008) identify two basic functions of district re-orientation: 1) refining and aligning organizational structures and processes to the elements of reform and 2) changing the district culture.

Refining the organizational structure to help a district achieve system-wide improvement is managed by making organizational changes that align the district operations with their improvement goals. Peterson, Murphy and Hallinger (1987) found

that districts with higher achievement than would be expected (considering the SES levels) had organizational structures that supported instructional development. These structures included mechanisms that controlled, coordinated, and assessed the technical core activities. Peterson (1999) found that another structural change that helped achieve improvement was espousing a vision and taking an active role in creating structures that helped implement the vision. Another productive structural change is decentralization. Kirp and Driver (1995) interviewed one superintendent who made decision-making a decentralized activity so that individuals at the sites were able to make decisions that reflected what was best at the local school level.

A district culture that promotes and supports improvement goals orients the district toward actual change (Rorrer, Skrla & Scheurich, 2008). McLaughlin (1992) notes that district culture helps support reform efforts. She explains: "The relationships between teachers and districts are powerful influences on teaching and have little to do with hierarchical structure and controls and everything to do with the norms, expectations, and values that shape the district…community" (p. 35). Elmore and Burney's (1997) study in NYC's Community SD2 demonstrated how re-orienting the organizational processes and structures and building culture can positively affect reform efforts. They found that sharing expertise, collaborating, and setting clear expectations are all important activities that improve the district culture.

The ultimate outcome of a school improvement effort is to ensure optimal learning opportunities for students. Much has been written concerning the link between school culture and school improvement. Sergiovanni (2001) explains that building a learning community is increasingly accepted as being the critical element of school

improvement. Barth (2001) wrote that the first and foremost purpose of a school is to create and provide a culture that promotes learning. Purkey and Smith (1983) note the importance of school culture in school improvement as they delineate several elements of a productive culture including collaboration, sense of community, and clear goals. Firestone and Wilson (1985) write, "Strong cultures with appropriate content can promote school effectiveness" (p. 11). Bulach (1999) stated that a leader must identify a school's culture before attempting to change it. Sarason (1996) argued that structural changes made in the name of education improvement are generally unsuccessful unless they address the culture and organizational health of the school system.

This case explores how the district culture affects a system-wide process of change. The next section reviews in greater detail the organizational culture literature. First the major schools of thought are identified. Then, an argument is made concerning the decision to position this study in a particular school of thought, especially the proposed linchpin concept of this study: ideology.

Organizational Culture and Ideology

The organizational culture of a district—and the schools within it—is a key component in producing positive educational change. For this study it is relevant to review literature on organizational culture. Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) composed a thorough and concise review of classic schools of thought concerning organizational culture. The following paragraphs pair their framework with direct citations from various pieces written within each school of thought. After reviewing the different organizational culture paradigms, the argument is made for situating this study in the

Symbolic school of thought, drawing primarily from Andrew Pettigrew's scholarship concerning the processual analysis of organizational culture and change.

The Functionalist school of thought views institutions and culture as functioning primarily to serve the interests and needs of individuals (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984). In this viewpoint, organizations are socio-cultural systems which will, or should, reflect their members' needs in their structures and processes. The Functionalists view culture as a means by which individuals satisfy their needs (Malinowski, 1944). This school of thought studies culture at particular points in time and space (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984).

The Structural-functionalist school views organizations as systems with goals, purpose, and needs that are in functional interaction with their environments (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984). This school of thought also studies culture at a particular point in time and space. The structural-functionalist views culture as a mechanism by which people are able "to live a social life as an ordered community in a given environment" (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984, p. 197). Prominent organizational culture researcher Edgar Schein (1988) writes that "this paradigm provides the best roadmap for studying what goes on in groups and organizations. Culture is a property of groups and can be thought of as the accumulated learning that a given group has acquired during its history" (p. 7). Schein (1988) defines organizational culture as

> A pattern of basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore is

to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 7)

The Ecological-adaptationist school views organizations as systems that take on different forms as they adapt to environmental characteristics (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984). Organizational culture is seen as a "system of socially transmitted behavior patterns that serve to relate human communities to their ecological settings" (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984, p. 197). The culture and the environment in which it rests are defined by their mutual coexistence; each influences the other. The Ecological-adaptationst perspective views time and space as dimensions of the development of culture (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984). The "socio-technical system" is a concept which derives from the Ecological-adaptationist paradigm. It explains that "any production system requires both a technology, a process of transforming raw materials into output, and a social structure linking the human operators with the technology and with each other" (Rosseau, 1977 p. 19).

The Historical-diffusionist school views organizations as "social actualizations of their genesis and historical transformations" (Allaire & Firsirotu, p. 202). Theorists who subscribe to this theory view culture as consisting of "temporal, interactive, super-organic, and autonomous configurations or forms which have been produced by historical circumstances and processes" (Alliare & Firsirotu, 1984, p. 218). This paradigm places emphasis on the time and place in which the process of culture emerges. An example of the emphasis placed on the element of time is found in Stinchcombe's (1965) explanation of social structure and organizations "organizations

formed at one time typically have a different social structure from those formed at another time" (p. 154).

The Functionalist, Structural-functionalist, Ecological-adaptationist, and the Historical-diffusionist paradigms all view culture as a component of the socio-cultural system manifested as behavior. Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) distinguish these paradigms from four other schools of thought which view culture as an ideational system holding cultural and social dimensions as interrelated yet distinct. Three of the ideational paradigms view culture as located in the minds of the culture-bearers; these are the Cognitive, Structuralist, and Mutual-equivalence schools. The fourth ideational paradigm views culture as located in shared meanings and symbols; this is the Symbolic paradigm to which the primary focus will be given for the remainder of this review of literature. First, however, a review of the Cognitive, Structuralist and Mutual-equivalence schools.

The Cognitive school spear-headed by Goodenough (1971), views organizational culture as a "set of cognitions organized into a system of knowledge and containing whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to the members of one's society" (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984, p. 205). This paradigm views organizations as social enactments of a collective mind.

The Structuralist school borrows concepts from structural linguistics and the sociological framework authored by Durkheim. It views culture as a product of the universal search for structure and processes of the mind. Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) write that this school views organizations as "social manifestations of universal and

unconscious processes of the human mind" (p. 205). Basic organizational features are the product of the rational choice of humans (March & Simon, 1958).

The Mutual-Equivalence Structure school views culture as a set of standardized cognitive processes which creates the framework that "enables a capacity for mutual prediction and interlocked behavior among individuals" (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984, p. 220). An organization is viewed as the place where an individual's interests, that is, an individual actor's micro-motives merges with the organization's macro-behavior (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984, p. 220). Weick's concept of causal maps and mutual equivalence is an example of a framework that follows this paradigm.

The Symbolic school of thought, also known as the Semiotic school, views culture as a product of the mind. This paradigm argues that culture is found in the shared "meanings" of symbols (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984). Language itself is a complex set of symbols used to ascribe meaning to the ideas around social actors; "symbols, or products of the mind, constitute the raw materials for the interpretation of the ordered system of meaning in terms of which social interaction takes place" (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984, p. 199). Central to the Symbolic school is Selznick's (1957) concept of organization, which he argues is a product of the historical context in which organizational administrative leaders guide the creation of the organization's culture. Another researcher in the Symbolic school is Pettigrew (1979) who explains that the organizational leaders, "may be seen not only as creators of some of the more rational and tangible aspects of organizations such as structures and technologies but also as creators of symbols, ideologies, languages, beliefs, rituals…aspects of…expressive

components of organizational life" (p. 574). Key to this paradigm is the relationship between meaning and action.

As previously mentioned, this study conceptualizes change not as an event, but a process. Additionally, it is assumed that change is a function of shared meaning. Moreover, as was argued earlier, the external context of schools, as found in the American political and cultural landscape, influences the process of change and the demand for reform. The third section of this review discussed the district role in balancing external and internal demands, demonstrating the key role leaders play. Pettigrew (1979) argues that context is absolutely essential in understanding a process of change in an organization. He explains that in order to understand change, the juxtaposition of the analytical and the political must be examined as well as the role of leaders in extreme circumstances, as well as the enabling and constraining forces of the environment… This processual analysis of change in organizational cultures seems well-fitted to probe the process of change that is the focus of this study. Culture affects change and Pettigrew's entire body of research assumes that change is a product of culture. This study is best positioned within Pettigrew's framework, which places emphasis on the internal and external context, the process of change, and the content (which is based on the culture).

Pettigrew (1979) examines organizational culture as it transforms over time. He argues that the concept of organizational culture "treated as a unitary concept…lacks analytical bite" (1979, p. 574), and that it is the source of a family of concepts which include ideology. Ideology is a particular kind of language, and language is a particular kind of symbol. Pettigrew uses Cohen's (1972) definition of symbols as "objects, acts,

relationships, or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of meanings, evoke emotions, and impel men to action" (p. 23). Language creates culture. Words are a part of action. Pettigrew (1979) explains, "Language is not just outside us and given to us as part of our cultural and historical heritage, it is also within us, we create it, and it impels us" (p. 575). Similarly, Mill (1972) writes, "A vocabulary is not merely a string of words; immanent within it are societal textures—institutional and political coordinates. [In] back of a vocabulary lie sets of collective action" (p. 62).

Language and symbols turn ideas into action. They impel action, especially when the symbols are organized into an ideology. Ideology plays a significant role in processes of change in organizations because it has the potential to link attitude and action. An ideology connects a broad moral diagnosis of a situation to action at a specific level (Pettigrew, 1979). An ideology is a central component in a process of change.

What is a process of change in an organization? Pettigrew (1997) argues that a process is a sequence of individual and collective events that describe how things change over time. He examines organizations as they change using the lens of processual analysis. For him the major focus of processual analysis is to "catch reality in flight" (Pettigrew, 1997, p.10). Thus, actions drive processes and actions are embedded in context. Context necessarily limits actors' information, insight, and influence. It is crucial to examine the relationship between agents and contexts over time in order to catch reality in flight. In this way, ideology plays an essential function in this case study. In order to understand organization change, the linkages between the change content, the context, and the process need to be studied. The connection

between action and context is bridged by ideology, which uses symbols (i.e. language) to create meaning about the social context surrounding the organization. This meaning is embedded in beliefs, which guide organization member actions and behaviors.

Chapter III: Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and themes that support and inform research. It explains the main concepts to be studied, the key factors and the presumed relationships among them (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It structures what the researcher plans to study,—it is a tentative theory or explanation of the phenomena that the researcher investigates (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Photography serves as a metaphor for the use of context in this conceptual framework. A photograph is a frozen moment in time. It does not capture movement. Motion pictures, on the other hand, create the illusion of movement, although even in motion pictures the true movement is not captured. Pettigrew (1997) explains that human conduct is perpetually in a process of becoming; the driving assumption of process thinking is that social reality is not a still state. So how can a study isolate change from its context? Can there be such a thing as a snapshot of motion? Can there be a snapshot of a process of change, or a process of becoming?

This research examines the process of creating shared meaning. It adopts the Symbolic paradigm of organizational culture. As mentioned in the last chapter the Symbolic paradigm argues that culture is found in the shared "meanings" of symbols (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984). Language is one such type of symbol. This conceptual framework takes the position that language, especially ideology, impels action. Pettigrew (1997) explains that actions drive processes and actions are embedded in context. Therefore, context matters in the exploration of a complex process of change.

The purpose of this study is to examine how social and political context affects ideological content of district leadership in a process of change. The terms used are informed by Pettigrew's work (1979, 1987, and 1997), but modified for this study. They are defined below.

***Context*:** *Outer context* includes the economic, social, political, competitive, and sectorial environments in which the organization is located; this study is mostly concerned with the political environment shaped by state-level politics. *Inner context* refers to the inner mosaic of the organization: the structural, cultural, and political environments found within the bounds of the school district.

***Process of change*:** a sequence of events, actions, and activities that incrementally create large-scale meaningful change within the organization of the school district. It is a state of continuous, high-level school improvement. In Greenfield, some tangible indicators of the process of change could include: widespread adherence to the Strategic Plan, the realization of the GPS mission, and the widespread willingness to be innovative.

Ideological Content or ***Ideology*:** A set of beliefs about the social world and how it operates, containing statements about the rightness of certain social arrangements and what action would be undertaken in the light of those statements (Pettigrew, 1979).

With these definitions, the purpose of the study can be further specified: the purpose of this study is to examine how district leaders' perceptions of the external political landscape and the internal district structural and cultural environment affect the ideology of the organization as it goes through a process of change. Even more specifically, the purpose of this study is to examine how the district leaders' perceptions

of the political environment and the district structure help them to create an ideology that invests others in Greenfield to take action toward a process of continual improvement.

Pettigrew's framework suggests that there is no such thing as a snapshot of organizational change. Instead of attempting to isolate conditions that create change, the overarching aim of studying a process of change is, according to Pettigrew (1997), to "catch reality in flight." How does one go about catching reality in flight? To create a motion picture, many still photographs are shot and then put together in rapid succession. This study attempts to catch reality in flight by piecing together the ideas, the actions, and the behaviors manifest in observations and interviews, and in this piecing together, produce not a snapshot, but a motion picture of the process of change.

The aim of this research is not to produce a case history; instead the aim is to produce a case study (Pettigrew, 1997). In a case study, the conceptual framework provides an analytical lens. Pettigrew (1997) names three major features of process case studies. First, there is a search for patterns in the process of change. Second, there is a search for underlying mechanisms that shape patterns in the process. The third analytical feature of the case study is that inductive pattern recognition must go hand in hand with deductive recognition (Pettigrew, 1997).

Additionally, Pettigrew (1997) specifies five guiding assumptions for conducting research on process.

1. Embeddedness, studying processes across a number of levels of analysis

2. Temporal interconnectedness, studying processes in past, present and future

3. A role in explanation for context and action (explaining the environment and what's happening)

4. A search for holistic rather than linear explanations of process

5. A need to link process analysis to the location and explanation of outcomes.

Pettigrew (1987) then uses these assumptions to conceptualize his approach to study major organizational transformations. His examination of organizational change is in terms of the linkages between the content of change and its context and process, and to regard leadership behavior as a central ingredient but only one of the ingredients, in a complex analytical, political, and cultural process of challenging and changing the core beliefs, structure, and strategy of the organization (see figure 3.1).

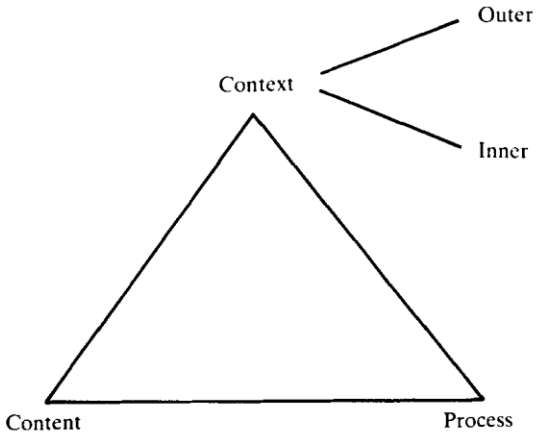

Figure 3.1: The Broad Framework guiding the research. From "Context and Action in the Transformation of the Firm," by A.M. Pettigrew, 1987, *Journal of Management Studies, 24,* p.657

This study tentatively adopted Pettigrew's framework, which analyzes the linkages between content, context, and process, to a case study of a single urban school district. However, after time spent in the field; the investigator decided to modify the framework. The three key concepts remained the same; but rather than investigating the bi-directional linkages between each concept, it became more useful to think of the

concepts as linked linearly. The decision to modify the framework and a discussion of the modification is discussed in further detail in the following method chapter.

Chapter IV: Method

Addressing the Ambiguity of Qualitative Methods

This chapter presents the research design and the specific procedures used to conduct the study. Qualitative research has a reputation for presenting methods as a "black box," mysterious in nature, intuitive in approach, and overall difficult to explain or replicate. The intent of this chapter is to articulate the methodological choices made and the implications of those choices. The researcher intends to outline the reasoning that links (a) the purpose of this study and the research questions with (b) the steps used for data collection, reduction, and analysis. The data collection process is described. Finally, the methods used for data analysis are discussed. Additionally, issues of validity, and ethical considerations are addressed.

Some scholars are skeptical about what qualitative researchers are actually doing when they reduce, analyze, and interpret data. Miles and Huberman (1984) explain that many qualitative researchers still consider analysis an art, stressing intuition as a large piece of the approach. "The status of conclusions from qualitative studies is uncertain because researchers don't report on their methodology, and researchers don't report on their methodology because there are no established conventions for doing that" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 22). Yet, many qualitative studies are published under the assumption that the findings are plausible; so surely there are "assumptions, criteria, decision rules, and operations for working with data to decide when a given finding is established and meaningful" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 22). Yin (2009) corroborates this point. "The analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies…unlike statistical analysis,

there are few fixed formulas…to guide the novice" (p. 127). Yin (2009) argues that it is up to the investigator to present rigorous empirical thinking along with sufficient evidence. Thus, the intent of this chapter is to present the ways in which this research design came to be. This report explicitly describes the process used to collect, reduce, and analyze the data.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how context affects ideological content of district leadership as it enacts change. The research questions are best answered by gaining a deep understanding of district leaders' perceptions of context, ideological beliefs, and the process of change. A study of perceptual phenomena lends itself to qualitative methods because qualitative research seeks a holistic overview of the context being studied by gathering data on the perceptions of individuals within that context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative data focus on "naturally occurring ordinary events in a natural setting" in order to gain an understanding of what real life is like in that setting (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). The best way to gain an understanding of individual perceptions about their context is to observe them within it.

Perceptions about ideology, change, and political context are complex, and because qualitative data are collected in close proximity to the situation being studied, and over a sustained period of time, they are able to reveal the intricacies of the perceptions with rich description (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This study examined the shared meanings individuals develop around the process of change. Miles and Huberman (1994) write, "Qualitative data with their emphasis on people's lived

experience are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on events [and] processes, and…for connecting these meanings to the social world around them" (p. 10). This study investigated the linkages between the context, the ideological content, and the process of change—three concepts that are best understood by studying the nuanced interactions, behaviors, and discussions of district leaders in their own environment.

Within the traditions of qualitative inquiry, this case study is ethnographic. Pelto (2013) argues that "The aims of ethnographic research…are to discover and represent faithfully the constructed social realities of various groups and communities in order to make better practical programs of change" (p. 35). Consistent with Pelto's claim, this study sought to gather information and produce insights into how one process of change unfolds. Ethnography "consists of the processes and products of research that document what people know, feel, and do in a way that situates the phenomena at specific points in time in the history of individual lives including…events and processes" (Handwerker, 2001, p. 7). Ethnographies are analytic descriptions of cultural scenes and groups which delineate the "shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and behaviors of some group of people" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 387).

Ethnography elicits data that "represent[s] the worldview of the participants being investigated" (LeCompte & Goetz, p. 388). Ethnographic strategies are empirical and naturalistic, "they involve the acquisition of first-hand sensory accounts of phenomena as they occur in the real world settings" (LeCompte & Goertz, p.388). The strategies used to gather data in ethnography are also holistic; ethnographers seek to

build descriptions of total phenomena within their context (LeCompte & Goetz). Because perceptions of context, ideology, and change process are continually developed by district leadership in their daily work, ethnography was the best approach to reveal these perceptions. The researcher was able to observe these day-to-day interactions and draw nuanced insights that would be difficult to attain through other methods.

The site for this case was chosen purposively (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Greenfield Public School District (GPS) has a new superintendent who was hired from within the district. In 2012, as deputy superintendent, Dr. Eisley led the district through a process of creating a new district-wide strategic plan. As superintendent, Eisley, made it clear that his primary goal is to guide the district through a system-wide change process with the Strategic Plan as the catalyst. This study highlighted a critical time period in the process of system wide change as the new superintendent worked to focus the district on the goals and processes of change. As Pettigrew suggests that processual analysis intends to catch reality in flight, Greenfield Public Schools was in a state of observable motion with district leaders working to spread a new ideology. The research questions are focused on district leadership perceptions. GPS has a traditional, hierarchical organizational structure for a large school district. There are eleven members of the district cabinet and the perceptions of these individuals are the focus of this study. The study concentrated on the perceptions of four cabinet members in particular, using open-ended interviews. More detail concerning the setting and the participants are included in the following chapter concerning the presentation of findings.

Collecting data using a variety of sources and methods is one aspect of triangulation (Maxwell, 2005). This strategy permits a broader understanding of the issues investigated, thereby reducing the likelihood of bias (Maxwell, 2005). The research questions were determined *a priori*, and thus, to some degree, defined the task of data collection. After deciding on a conceptual framework based on context, ideological content, and process of change; the researcher developed research questions around these three concepts. Three forms of data collection techniques were used to gather data for the questions: participant observation, interviews, and artifacts including information from the district website and other written documents. Reviewed below are the eight research questions and a table which illustrates the technique of data collection used to answer the research questions.

Research Questions

1. How do district leaders perceive the external social and political environment?
2. How do district leader perceptions of the external environment affect beliefs about the district's ability to go through a process of change?
3. How do district leaders communicate their beliefs about the effects that the external environment has on the district's ability to go through a process change?
    a. To each other in cabinet
    b. To principals and teachers
    c. To the school board
    d. To parents
    e. To the media

4. How do district leaders perceive the internal social political structural environment of the district?
5. How do those perceptions of internal context affect district leader beliefs about the ability to change?
6. What is the ideology espoused by district leaders?
7. How do the beliefs of internal and external context shape district leader ideology?
8. How do district leaders perceive change in the district?

	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4	RQ5	RQ6	RQ7	RQ8
Participant observation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Interview	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Written artifacts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				

Table 4.1 Data Collection Technique used for the Eight Research Questions

In addition to triangulating multiple sources of evidence—observations, interviews, documentation—member checks or "respondent validation" supported the validity of the data (Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell also argues that intensive, long-term involvement with the site via participant observation increases the likelihood that the data are more direct and less dependent on inference. This study spanned more than a twelve month period.

In qualitative studies the investigator is the instrument of the research. It is important to discuss the data collection techniques in order to probe the trustworthiness of the data collection process. This ethnographic case study is structured on the method of participant observation. DeWalt and DeWalt (2010) write that "participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture (p. 1). Pelto (2013) explains that two of the main characteristics of participant observation are 1) to use it as a means of getting to know the group under study so that they will trust you and give honest answers when interviewed later on, and 2) to use it as a means of gaining an understanding of the behaviors and language of the group under study so that the researcher can later create intelligent questions centered around issues which come up during the observed activities. Most researchers who use participant observation also use other more structured data collection methods (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). In fact, participant observation often opens the door for techniques such as semi-structured, informal, and formal interviews (Pelto, 2013).

As the instrument of data collection, it is important for investigators to reveal their background. Readers are thus alerted to potential biases. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) explain, "The ethnographer cannot neglect her [sic] own involvement in observed scenes, in making the observations and writing them up…not merely a picture of this life and concerns of others, but rather a picture of this life and these concerns as seen, understood, and conveyed by the ethnographer" (p.60). The observational and interview data were all filtered through the experiences of the investigator. By self-

consciously recognizing one's fundamental orientation, the investigator may use it to highlight issues and insights particular to his or her experience as well (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). In an effort to provide full disclosure of the potential bias, the investigator provides the following summary of her background[1].

I taught in the neighboring, much larger public school district, Midwestern City Public Schools (MCPS) with Teach for America for two years. I had a deep loyalty to MCPS, a pride in having shared in its hardship, while understanding MCPS has serious problems. After two years as a teacher in MCPS, the middle school in which I taught was closed in a re-districting of school boundaries; schools like mine, with poor standardized test performance targeted for closure. This event solidified my view that many of the problems with the public education system are in fact systemic. In an effort to learn more about the research surrounding these issues, I became a full-time doctoral student and member of an educational policy research team at one of the major research institutions in the state.

At one point, members of the research team were invited to take a tour of Greenfield Public Schools (GPS) by Dr. Eisley[2]. Dr. Eisley received his doctorate under the tutelage of one of the senior members of the team, and was a colleague of another senior member. Dr. Eisley made it clear that the team was invited to tour the district to determine if we would be willing to work with the district on capacity building research. The team eventually began working with the district and this partnership laid the foundation for this study.

[1] From this point forward, for sake of clarity, the investigator uses the first person pronoun.
[2] I refer to Dr. Eisley (and later Dr. Richards) with their titles because it reflects the common practice of their colleagues, whereas the other participants (Heidi Buesking and Linda Burton) were called by their first name. This reveals an underlying collegial deference to these positions.

I was intrigued by Dr. Eisley's willingness to permit research at GPS, a condition in stark contrast with my experience in neighboring MCPS. I approached Dr. Eisley asking him if he would be willing to let me study the district and its leadership; he agreed. In fact, he was eager for the study to begin. I initially entered the field with a vague vision of looking at the importance of his Strategic Plan.

After spending approximately four months at GPS, and gaining the trust of those I observed, I accepted a position to manage a statewide political campaign for a candidate who ran for the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. This new role resulted in a hiatus in my observation at GPS; however, it provided me with the opportunity to visit school districts across the state. On a very surface level, I saw the challenges and strengths of public schools in rural, urban, suburban, wealthy, and impoverished areas. I heard from k-12 educators across the state who were unhappy with lack of support for public education from the state lawmakers. I also saw some of the inner-workings of political strategy, which left me cynical about a system in dire need of a deep overhaul.

Following the primary election, I left the political campaign and returned to the study at hand. By this time, the cabinet members at GPS were familiar with my temporary political role, and I made a formal statement with the cabinet to tell them that that role was indeed temporary, and that I was returning to my research full-time. It was after my return to GPS, that I began to narrow the focus of the study so that I would no longer be looking generally at the leadership of the district. I now had a conceptual framework guiding my observations and eventual interviews.

I have no doubt that my work at the neighboring MCPS, my studies with the education policy research team, and my stint as a campaign manager have influenced my observational work. Rather than bracketing the experience, I choose to bring it to the fore; to acknowledge its effect on my "fundamental orientation." DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) explain, "…all of us bring biases… to the field…[in] our reporting, however, [we] should attempt to make these biases as explicit as possible so that others may use these in judging our work" (p. 95). In fact, I would argue that these experiences helped me narrow the focus of the conceptual framework for this study, as they provided me with a perspective that seeks out the roles that both politics and language play in the realm of education reform.

Data Collection

This section explains how I gained entry into the field, and secured interviews. Chapter five contains a rich description of the setting, and biographical profiles of each interviewed participant; here, the general analytical approach is described.

I entered the field with the broad intent to examine the role of the superintendent's Strategic Plan in developing an innovative district. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) claim that it is imperative that the field worker contact and secure permission to enter the field from local leaders or gatekeepers who represent the community in which the research takes place. During the initial meeting with Dr. Eisley, I asked to begin sitting in on cabinet meetings; he gladly gave consent. He suggested that I coordinate with Eileen Packard, his administrative assistant, to learn about his schedule and cabinet meeting times. Eileen and Dr. Eisley provided me with

unrestricted observational access, with the exception of personnel issues. The ease of my access into the field is noteworthy as DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) explain, "Gaining permission is the first step for carrying out research…gaining access to specific institutions, places, and events may take more time" (p. 44).

I sat in on cabinet meetings, which took place on Monday mornings in a conference room at the Education Service Center. I always had my notebook in hand, but no recording device, in an effort to be as discreet as possible. Pelto (2013) explains, "Many researchers carry a mid-sized notebook as a visible mark of their dedicated research activity" (p.111). My notebook was much less intrusive than a recording device, yet it was also visible enough that it made clear that I was observing the activity. Spradley (1980) says that the role of the participant observer develops throughout the research; he writes:

> You will have to maintain a dual purpose: you will want to seek to participate and to watch yourself and others at the same time…make yourself explicitly aware of things that others take for granted…you will experience the feeling of being both an insider and an outsider (p. 58).

During the first observation of cabinet, I introduced myself to the group. I had hoped to take on a role of "passive observer" in which I would not interact with other people to any great extent (Spradley, 1980, p.59). It soon became apparent that cabinet members would not permit me to be a mere observer. Cabinet members were curious about the study. I explained simply that Dr. Eisley's leadership would be the focus of the study.

During the course of my early observations, cabinet members would occasionally make comments like, "Now don't put that in the notes!" and laugh when anyone would say something slightly controversial. I would smile, drop my pen, and hold my hands up to show that I would not make record of anything that they—even jokingly—did not want me to include.

With time, cabinet members became used to my presence. At first, I thought my presence went unnoticed, but in hindsight, I realize that I was privileged to have a seat amongst a very exclusive executive team. The cabinet members, however, were always warm and welcomed me. How was I able to gain such ease of entry into this tight group? I attribute their welcoming nature to several things. One, Greenfield Public Schools is a district situated in a state that prides itself on friendliness; the executive cabinet is the epitome of that open, smiling, Southern charm. Also, cabinet members wanted to demonstrate that they have nothing to hide and that they welcome inspection. Lastly, cabinet members were familiar and respectful of the work of my research team; they knew that I was a former public school teacher, and they also widely supported the candidate whose campaign I managed—these roles helped me to present myself as approachable and trustworthy. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) discuss the establishment of rapport; they define rapport as:

> a state of interaction achieved when the participants come to share the same goals…when both the 'informant' and the researcher come to the point when each is committed to help the other achieve his or her goal, when informants participate in providing information for 'the book' or the study, and when the

researcher approaches the interaction in a respectful and thoughtful way that allows the informant to tell his or her story (p. 47).

At first, I thought my presence aroused curiosity. For example, one cabinet member asked me if I would be quoting her verbatim. This same cabinet member eventually was the first one to welcome me to "the table." This move to "the table" was taken with caution and some anxiety. During the first month of observation, I would sit in a chair placed along the wall of the conference room, in an effort to "blend into the background." After about a month of observations, the cabinet members insisted that I join them at the conference table. So, what is significant about the invitation to move to "the table?" Sitting at the table changed my investigative role from one of passive observer viewed with some reservation, to participant observer viewed with wide acceptance. "Many fieldworkers find that they can point to a single event or moment in which the groundwork for the development of true rapport and participation in the setting was established" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 54). My invitation to the table is the moment in which I "broke through" the field.

During the first period of data collection, I was not certain what I was looking for; I just knew that I needed to get into the field. I immersed myself in literature concerning change in schools and diffusion of innovation. I wrote a study proposal that lacked a strong conceptual framework. There was more work to be done. I stepped away from the field, and when I returned, I had acquired campaign experience. I now knew that I was interested in how the political environment was shaping the decisions that school leaders were making. I re-immersed myself in the literature. Having spent time in the field, I was also aware of a certain language that I perceived as being shared

by the cabinet members. After much deliberation, I developed a new research proposal with a conceptual framework that included elements of the political environment, language, and the innovative work that I believed was occurring at GPS. This conceptual framework was based on Pettigrew's ideas of context, content and process of change. This time, as I entered the field, I had a narrowed focus. I had a purpose to my study; this sense of purpose fed into every aspect of my fieldwork.

My method for note taking was to write down everything I heard concerning the external political environment, the internal political environment, the language used to motivate people within the district, and the innovative work of the district. I excluded discussions concerning personnel, focused less on issues of district operations, and the technicalities of district finances. I took notes in the form of a theatrical script: writing down who said what. I immediately transcribed the notes from my notebook to computer documents, upon leaving the field. While time-consuming and burdensome, I view the practice of transcribing interviews as largely beneficial—it forced me to get very familiar with the data.

My participant observation led me to decide on semi-structured interviews as another data collection technique. It was from my experience in the field that I was able to determine which cabinet members I would ask to interview individually. There are eleven members of the executive cabinet. The cabinet members I interviewed were selected because of their departmental roles in the district. While I had rapport with all eleven, some of them had positions that I deemed less influential over the three features of the conceptual framework. I excluded the cabinet members who managed finances, district operations, technology, federal grants, student achievement, and human

resources as their roles were concerned with technical operations largely outside the scope of this study. Additionally, I excluded one cabinet member from my selection of individual interviews based on a personal tragedy that occurred in her family. The four cabinet members I chose to interview individually were selected because of their positions. I wanted to gain insight from the perspectives of the district figure-head, the superintendent, Dr. Michael Eisley; the district instructional leader, Dr. Laura Richards; the head of district communications, Linda Burton; and the director of elementary education, an individual who takes the concerns of cabinet and brings them to the principals and vice-versa, Heidi Buesking. All four individuals agreed to the interviews.

On two separate occasions, I met individually with each of the four participants for approximately an hour at a time convenient to them. A more in-depth profile of the participants will be provided in the following chapter. The interview questions focused on the political environment, the culture of the district, the ideology of the leaders, and the innovativeness of the district juxtaposed with the growth of the high poverty student demographic (see Appendix A for example protocols). All interviewed participants agreed to be audio-recorded. The investigator continued to take notes in her notebook, in case the recording device failed, and also to note body language lost in an audio-recording.

Transcripts were given to individual participants for member checking. Two of the participants requested changes to protect anonymity or for clarification of their statements. Corrections were made and transcripts were again provided to individuals

for review. After the first round of interview and transcription, I developed a second interview protocol. The second round interview process was identical to the first.

Data Reduction

Like all raw data, qualitative data must be reduced. Miles and Huberman (1994) write, "Material collected through qualitative methods is invariably unstructured and unwieldy…moreover the internal context of the material is usually in detailed and micro form" (p. 309). However, the researcher needs to provide structure to these data without losing the original accounts. Geertz (1973) explains that the act of writing down observations is itself an act of selection. By writing about certain things, one necessarily excludes other things. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue, "Qualitative data collection is naturally a selective process (p.34)".

I relied heavily on the expertise of Yin (2009) and Miles and Huberman (1994, 2002) to guide the data reduction technique. Miles and Huberman delineate extensively an array of coding processes, and I used codes as they suggest. They define codes as "tags or labels for assigning meaning to descriptive information. Codes are usually attached to 'chunks' of varying size" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 204). Codes are used to retrieve and organize the chunks: clustering codes sets the stage for drawing conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994) identify three classes of codes: descriptive, interpretive, and pattern codes and they prefer creating a provisional start list of codes prior to field work. I did not create the start list prior to the field work, but created it prior to any data reduction. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that the start list should come from the conceptual framework, research questions, and key ideas.

Initially, my start list included codes for nearly everything! I did not want to lose any information; but, that proved cumbersome. Creating a code for every chunk of data did not serve the purpose of data *reduction*. I thought that I could collapse these many codes into a few major overlapping codes, but that only left me with a smaller number of general codes: again no precision, so I discarded the idea of "collapsing" the codes. I went back to Miles and Huberman (1994). They suggest that the researcher create a master code list—a start list can have up to sixty codes that can be kept in short term memory if they have a meaningful rationale.

This led me to think about what codes actually have significance for this conceptual framework. I started to exclude codes concerning financial issues, human resource issues, and other similar themes that did not add insight to this study. I then was able to boil the codes down to about fifty. These fifty codes allowed me to focus on the themes set by the parameters of the conceptual framework: context, ideological content, and process of change. The list of codes is included in Appendix B. I printed hard copies of all the interviews and observations and applied these codes by hand in the margins of the pages.

Codes will likely be revised throughout their application to the data chunks (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As I coded, several new codes emerged progressively which Miles and Huberman claim demonstrates that the researcher is open to what the site has to say instead of force-fitting data into pre-existing codes.

Miles and Huberman (1994) write that codes provide structure. They explain that a well-structured code list is keyed to the research questions, defined precisely, and has a name that is close to the concept and meaning. I keyed the codes to the

conceptual framework, and provided them with names that closely resemble their meaning. Once the descriptive coding is done, pattern coding should take place (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Pattern codes are explanatory, identifying themes and pulling together a lot of material into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis. Pattern coding has three important functions: it reduces large amounts of data into smaller numbers of analytic units, it gets the researcher into analysis, and it summarizes themes, causes, relationships among people, and more theoretical constructs.

Additionally, Miles and Huberman (1994) place great emphasis on mapping and matrices of the pattern codes. I found that focusing on matrices caused me to lose sight of the deeper insights. The mapping and matrices approach started to become an end of analysis rather than a means to it. The matrices were useful when graphing the volumes of themes across respondents and interviews, see Appendix D. That exercise helped confirm that certain themes were of the greatest importance. At this point I took a departure from Miles and Huberman, employing another technique to replace pattern coding and matrix analysis. I designed summary sheets for each observation and interview. The summary sheets provided the same important functions as the pattern coding (see sample summary sheet in Appendix C).

Yin (2009) describes a variety of tools in qualitative analysis. He argues that "any patterns, such as the frequency of codes or code combinations will still be conceptually more primitive than the initial "how and "why" research questions that might have led to your case study in the first place… You need your own analytic rationale (p.128)." Additionally, Yin (2009) suggests that one way of creating that analytic rationale is to design some broad analytical questions and then identify the

evidence that addresses the question. He explains that the researcher should draw a tentative conclusion based on the evidence's weight and then display the evidence in a way that provides readers with the opportunity to check the evidence. At this point the data I collected were reduced to the form of summary sheets, matrices, and vignettes. Then the data analysis process began.

Data Analysis

Taking notes is a form of analysis. Coding is another form of analysis. Neither of those steps, however, functions primarily as analysis. Rather, both steps reduce data to the point where it can be analyzed. While I coded the data, I simultaneously kept a running commentary in a separate notebook, recording vignettes that seemed important, but didn't exactly fit the parameters of the codes. I also kept track of key features that fit in well with the conceptual framework. I used the summary sheets, the matrix which delineated the frequency of codes, and the running commentary of vignettes to center my data analysis.

I then reviewed the research questions and conceptual framework. I thought about the large narrative of Greenfield Public Schools and how it "meshed" and "clashed" with the conceptual framework. I determined at this point that Pettigrew's triangular figure used to symbolize this study of the linkages between context, content, and process of change was no longer useful. This realization, paired with Yin's (2009) suggestion of creating broad basic questions, helped me develop a process for analyzing the reduced data.

I determined that the concepts of context, ideological content, and process of change are best thought of as a linear process rather than a cyclical one. In this linear view of process, inputs lead to process which leads to outcomes. In this study, the context makes up the "inputs," the ideology or content of change composes the "process," and the process of change is the "outcome" (see figure 4.1).

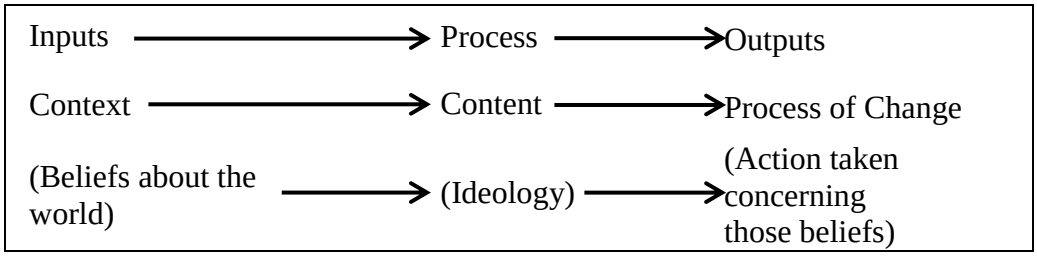

Figure 4.1. Conceptual framework in linear form

This change in the conceptualization of the study allowed me to create a series of basic broad questions based on Yin's (2009) suggestion.

1. What is the organization under study?

2. Who are the participants?

3. What are the participants trying to accomplish within this organization?

4. How does each participant work to accomplish this?

5. What is the overall "shared-ness" of these four perspectives? (see figure 4.2)

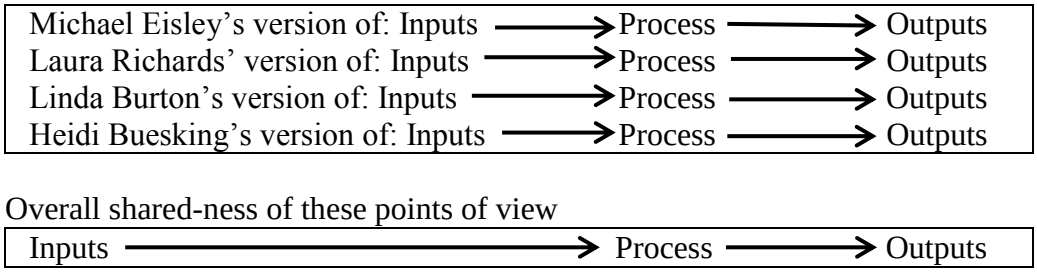

Figure 4.2. Conceptual framework for data analysis

These broad basic questions allowed me to apply the conceptual framework to analyze the reduced data without cherry-picking for findings that make nice, neat answers to the original research questions of the study. They also helped me to create a narrative based on the framework without force-fitting quotes. I used Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) to inform my last level of analysis, which is reported in the findings. The authors suggest, "The most common means of organizing a findings chapter…is through a discussion of the research questions one by one and the evidence you have from the data about how they might be answered" (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008, p.109). At this point of analysis, the data used to answer the research questions were reduced and compiled from the broad, basic questions above. Several iterations of analysis took place. Each iteration was meant to reduce the data to a useable amount, staying true to the accounts, and bearing in mind the purpose of the study. The following figure demonstrates the hierarchy of analysis from the least amount of data greatest to the least (see fig. 4.3).

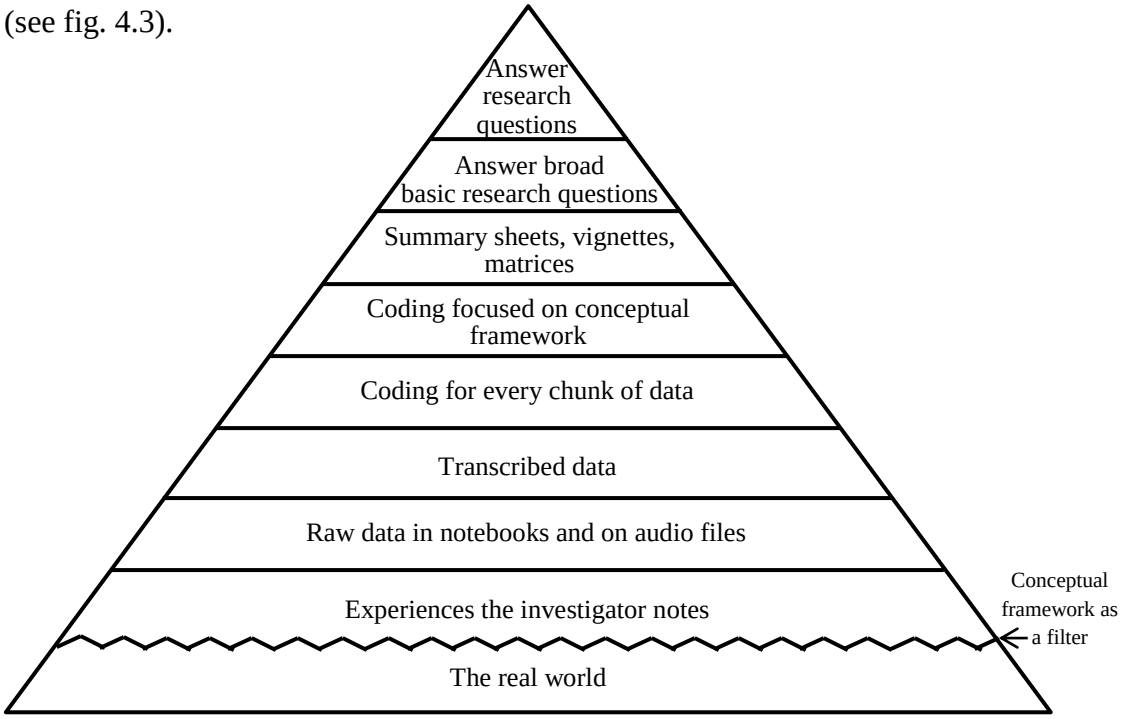

Figure 4.3. Data reduction process

Issues of Validity and Ethical Considerations

Maxwell (2005) describes validity as "a fairly straightforward, commonsense way to refer to the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (p.106). A threat to validity is any way the researcher might be wrong (Maxwell, 2005). One major threat to validity is researcher bias. Maxwell (2005) suggests "Explaining your possible biases and how you will deal with these is a key task of your research proposal" (p. 108). My biases are confronted in the sections above. Maxwell (2005) delineates eight strategies for addressing potential threats to validity; these are: long term involvement, rich data, respondent validation, intervention, searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases, triangulation, quasi-statistics, comparison (Maxwell, 2005).

I was involved with the study for more than a year. The data are detailed and have enough variety to provide a full and revealing picture of what is taking place (Becker, 1970). Member checks were performed. Triangulation was achieved through the use of various forms of data. In these ways, I addressed potential threats to validity of the study.

The question of informed consent is an issue with any ethnographic study. While informed consent was initially based on the risks of biomedical and experimental forms of research, the same guidelines apply to ethnographic fieldwork. Thorne (1980) explains that in the field the risks and benefits of research are difficult to assess. Field workers usually enter the site with an open-ended sense of purpose, "the very flexibility which is often cited as a major strength of the field poses obstacles for implementing a

tight notion of informed consent" (Thorne, 1980, p. 287). This discussion of informed consent is indicative of the arguably larger issue of whether or not the participant observer's presence alters the behaviors and interactions of individuals at the research site. This limitation is inherent in ethnography.

Chapter V: Presentation of Findings

Indicative of the ambiguity of qualitative methods, I struggled to draw distinction between findings, analysis of findings, and conclusions. Indeed, what are findings in a qualitative study? I argue that the findings are the information yielded by the data in response to the research questions. It is with this understanding that I organize chapter five. In this chapter, a description of the setting of this study, and a biographical profile for each of the participants is provided. Then the findings for the eight research questions are presented. Each research question is re-introduced, followed by an overall finding for that question. Interview excerpts and quotes are included to provide evidence for every finding presented. At the end of the chapter, I provide an outline which summarizes the findings by excluding the interview excerpts.

The Greenfield Public Schools Setting

Greenfield Public Schools serves approximately 15,000 students pre-k through twelfth grade. Its boundaries fall within parts of Midwestern City and the neighboring suburb of Grand Valley. The district has an Early Childhood Center for three year olds, thirteen elementary schools, and five secondary schools: three intermediary schools, a High School and an alternative high school.

Greenfield Public Schools benefits greatly from the repeated passage of bond issues. Its website profile states, "Successful bond issues have funded the state-of-the art tools to enhance reading, language, math, science, and writing skills at every grade level." The district facilities and grounds have also benefitted from this large bonding capacity. It has a state-of-the-art Performing Arts Center, a Multi-purpose Activities

Center, and an innovative High School facility—Greenfield University Quad. Concerning the Multi-purpose Activities Center, the website states that it is a "Mid-sized venue…includes a 5,600 seat multi-use arena, versatile floor space, a spirit store, locker and dressing rooms, concessions, offices, and a wellness center managed by the YMCA. The [Center] is designed to easily accommodate conventions, trade shows, sporting events..." The innovative high school facility is billed as having "transformed the high school into higher education…Greenfield wants 100% of its students to graduate career and college ready, so its bringing college to them…students enjoy an experience that emulates college both academically and aesthetically…"

These "high-end" facilities that encourage the Greenfield community to take great pride in the student activities and academic excellence are juxtaposed against the reality of a dramatic increase of students in poverty. The students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (FRL) status have increased by more than 40% in the last ten years. In 2004, the percent of Greenfield students qualifying for FRL was 27.51%, in 2009 44.31%, and in 2014, 69.42% of the Greenfield students qualified for FRL. These figures were not easily accessible from the Greenfield website; in fact, I had to ask the superintendent's administrative assistant for those numbers. Interestingly, the administrative assistant, Eileen, explained in her email with the statistics, that while there has been an increase, some of it may be attributed to the effort of district personnel to help families sign up for the FRL program.

Greenfield has several programs/initiatives that specifically target the challenges of students in poverty. These include the neighborhood schools initiative, the KidsFirst Program, and the Early Childhood Center. I accessed information

describing neighborhood schools through one elementary school's profile on the GPS website. Lewis Elementary School is a community school. It describes the initiative as creating a place

> …where the school becomes the heart of its neighborhood, where services, support, and opportunities lead to improved student learning, stronger families, and a healthier community. Lewis, in collaboration with people from many different sectors and walks of life, offers initiatives to meet the needs of the whole child. In doing so, Lewis ensures enduring relationships among educators, families, community volunteers, businesses, health and social service agencies, community faith-based groups, youth development organizations, and others committed to children. Those relationships are changing the educational landscape for each child, the school, the district, and our community. (Lewis Elementary website accessed 9 April 2015)

Additionally, information was readily accessible concerning the KidsFirst Program. This is an adolescent social services program made possible by a partnership between Greenfield Public Schools and the Community Action Assembly of Midwestern City. The program is based off of a successful national model that is "guided by a philosophy that identifies youth as 'at promise' rather than 'at risk,' the program is designed to enhance students' social, emotional, and academic capacity by fostering a decision plan to avoid teen pregnancy" (GPS website, accessed 9 April 2015). There are approximately 850 students in grades six through nine being served by this initiative.

At Greenfield, the STEM initiative is an interdisciplinary approach to learning that encourages students to inquire, explore and problem solve. Greenfield's vision for STEM is a framework that provides direction for implementation, aids in curriculum and professional development, and drives the district mission of 100% Graduation, College and Career Ready. It is expected to be a routine part of every student's classroom experience; it is geared to be more holistic than just a mandatory lab or a singular science-based classroom experience.

The Early Childhood Center is located at the Abigail Adams Elementary school site. Its mission is to enhance the development of very young children and promote healthy family functioning. The initiative involves weekly home-based visits as well as a full day educational service for qualifying families that live in the Greenfield district.

Other innovative initiatives at Greenfield include its University Quad vision. The website states that in partnership with the local community college, Greenfield was one of the first districts to pilot a concurrent enrollment program for students to earn high school and college credits virtually tuition-free.

Greenfield centers its initiatives and vision on its Strategic Plan. The website grants easy access to the Greenfield Strategic Plan which opens with a letter from Dr. Eisley. In the letter he states, "Enhancing ways to continue student excellence in Greenfield Public Schools is the focus of this Strategic Plan. Our belief that the pursuit of excellence is fundamental and unending serves to secure our place as one of the best school districts in the nation…" The Greenfield vision is "100% Graduation, College and Career Ready." The district motto is, "Together… we make a difference."

Greenfield grew by just over two percent from the previous school year; its student ethnic composition is 5.6% Native American, 14.7% African American, 7.5% multi-racial, 7% Asian, 65.1% White, 25.3% Hispanic. The Greenfield website also reports that more than 13,000 of its students are involved in some form of the arts while 2,400 students participated in non-competitive sports, and approximately 1,725 students were in a competitive sports team. Greenfield employs seventy-two administrators, 933 certified teachers, 877 support staff employees.

Participant Profiles

Dr. Michael Eisley has been at GPS since 1986, he began working there as a high school teacher. He also served as a high school assistant principal, middle school principal, Director of Secondary Education, and was the Assistant Superintendent to Dr. Hollis before he became Superintendent. Dr. Eisley received a doctorate in education. He has an understated commanding presence. He presents himself as well-read, highly-informed, and very rational. Unlike many male superintendents in the region, he appears much more as a "gentleman-scholar" than a "good ol' boy." Dr. Eisley has the ability to make the person speaking to him feel like he or she has his full attention, whether that person is a high school student, graduate researcher, or candidate for State Superintendent. He has earned respect from the years of service he has dedicated to public education. Dr. Eisley describes the rhythm of his work schedule as enjoyable, but at times, overwhelming. He speaks to the routine of a typical day as follows:

> *Dr. Eisley: They are such demanding jobs…I work six days a week. I try to take one day to myself and my family. But I always have to work six days a week.*

And again, those hours when they're on the low end, are nine hours, but typically they're always on the ten-twelve-thirteen hour days always. I leave the house at 7:00. Sometimes 6:45 and I'm typically walking in the door around news time. You know, if I'm fortunate it might be 9:00 and I can catch a little bit of news for an hour or sports, or programs I might want to see… and it's time to catch up on some emails and, uh, address any questions I might need to address and then start all over again. It's just like clockwork.

It is precisely because he presents himself as an individual who makes decisions based on information rather than emotion that makes his dedication to Greenfield's mission all the more powerful. One of the cabinet members said the following of Dr. Eisley's reputation of being a reserved, humble leader:

Um. I have really noticed with Dr. Eisley that he has a really hard time accepting credit… Um, he's extremely humble, and I'm not saying that [the previous Superintendent] Dr. Hollis wasn't. He just, I mean. I see it every…weekly. Um…In fact, whenever he speaks, whenever, whatever group he speaks in front of, it is never about him! He is constantly passing the credit off. Um, or the bulk of the responsibility. You know, it's never, never that he did this—"Oh, this was cabinet, or this was, you know—it's not about me it's about the great team that I've put together and the principals and the teachers"…It's just…I've never seen him take credit for anything… [And] I'll have to tell you, as far as looking ahead, Dr. Eisley is looking at the whole picture. He's [concerned with] the whole district.

When I posed the following question to him, "From my perspective you present yourself publically as someone with a lot of humility, and you very rarely take credit for what's happening here…why?" Dr. Eisley responded with the following thoughtful remarks which demonstrate the degree to which he views his role as a servant, as a thinker, and as an advocate for public education:

> Dr. *Eisley: I can't. Um, because [thoughtfully, long pause], yeah. Yeah, I can't, Ellen, because it's um, it's the work of many. It is, it is a, um, [long pause] it's a collection of efforts and commitments for a bigger cause than just a superintendent… [Long pause]…um…saying that this is what he or she wants to do. Um. [long pause] You know Peter Drucker, who I used to read a lot of, but I found his works difficult to read because I don't think I was smart enough to understand what he was saying. He was so smart. Um. I always considered him to be the father of organizational management. And, Drucker used to say some of these things, and I took this to heart when I read this many, many years ago. That the three greatest qualities of leaders, and we're talking about leaders like the Jack Welches of the world, who used to be the CEO of General Motors…People who have endured the test of time, and have sustained their companies from not just good companies, but to great companies. Leaders possess three things. Because leaders, it's very telling, because some of them come in and [snaps fingers] have that shock value, and they're done, burnt, gone, whatever. But Drucker said these three things and I take this to heart. That, that effective and quality enduring leaders have these three characteristics: They have a high degree of integrity. [Long pause.] They have*

a high degree of humility. [Long pause.] And they have a high degree of generosity. [Long pause.] And…

E: And those are easy words to say…

Dr. *Eisley: And Drucker didn't say they have a high degree of intelligence. He didn't talk about intellectual acuity. He didn't say anything about intelligence. So as a leader, if you really sit back and think about that, you know, I exist…because of…the commitment, the intelligence of others…in this district. [Long pause.] And, um the pursuit of excellence as the body of what we have and everything that we do, I can't take credit for that. I-I-I have to say to them: "I want to be with you as we pursue this never ending pursuit of excellence. Here are my expectations." I can set that tone, by not only speaking it but also by living it. By the way I work, right? And what I do, but a leader, really an effective leader only exists at the mercy of those whom you serve. And so, you know, I appreciate your kind words that I don't take credit for a lot of things, but I can't. I could not in good faith do that because I'm only as good as the people who I serve.*

Dr. Laura Richards began working at GPS in 1999 as the district's Director of Assessment. She also served in the roles of Executive Director of Elementary Education and Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning before taking her current position of Associate Superintendent. Before working at GPS, she taught both elementary and middle school in two different regions in the state. She also has experience working for the State Department of Education, and as a testing consultant.

She has a Ph.D. in education. Dr. Richards is a tall woman who projects confidence, charisma, and composure, while also expressing deep passion for her work. She is quick-witted, she thinks on the fly, and she sees the connections between people and experiences. Her leadership style is self-described as "sharp," in the following quote:

> *Dr. Richards: You know, we, we are a drama free department, and everybody works hard. And we just don't tolerate people not doing what they're supposed to do. Now sometimes that can make me--people say that I'm sharp. Not sharp as in "smart," but, you know I'm sharp with people because sometimes, I'm, I can, I'm-- sharp. So those are things for me…I don't ever want to become Michelle Rhee (laughs)!*

Dr. Richards fires at full throttle and expects those around her to run along at the same fast pace. She is dynamic with experience that spans a variety of roles beyond that of classroom teacher and school principal. One of the cabinet members described the work that Dr. Richards does as follows:

> *Oh! Dr. Richards-- her focus is teaching and learning. I don't think there is anyone smarter or brighter, um, more focused, [who] knows what they want…than her… I don't think there's anyone that can do that job. You know they say we're all replaceable, but I don't think she is. (laughs) I don't. Fortunately, she's really young, too.*

Having grown up with "working-class" parents, Dr. Richards explained that she feels very fortunate that she was given the opportunities she had, and she wants to work

to ensure that similar opportunities are not left up to chance for students who don't have advocates in their lives. She also expressed deep respect and gratitude for the support staff of Greenfield. In the following quote, Dr. Richards emotionally shared her respect for the dedication of the GPS school bus drivers:

> *Dr. Richards: This isn't only accomplished at the teacher level. This is definitely not accomplished at the superintendent level—at the service center level. This is--affects the bus driver, the child nutrition worker. You know one of the most…I can cry telling this story. But seriously when [long pause, holds back a tear]…We walked in…[chokes up a bit]. Sorry. We walked into a transportation meeting…where all our bus drivers were. And they were wearing a shirt that says, "We Drive Champions." [Chokes up…So do I.] They make seven dollars an hour. I mean… They're proud of the kids. They're proud of the organization. [long pause] It's. So it's telling the story. Re-telling the story. It's spending time with people when you don't have the time to spend. But, the scariest thing to me is, in a time when there's so much dis-interest in public education, or a lack of commitment to public education…people are divesting themselves. States are divesting themselves. Public schools…it scares me about how do you keep asking people to do work at this level in a sustainable way day after day, year after year, at a wage that they can't support their families! So it's very scary to me. If we can keep attracting the same caliber of talent, it's definitely sustainable…but it takes resources! And…We're making this progress on the backs of people. On the backs of teachers, and on the backs of para-professionals, people who are-are doing exactly what we expect of them and ten*

times more. And it really…I-I-I-I can get emotional about it because when you look at the fact that a special education aide, who is changing diapers, and making sure that a student is comfortable, and is as stretched and challenged as they possibly can be—who feels excited about coming to school every day…And this person is paid $15,000 a YEAR [Starts to choke up again]… It's a CRIME.

Heidi Buesking has worked at GPS for twenty-five years serving as an elementary teacher and school principal prior to taking on her current role as the Executive Director of Elementary Education. She has a master's degree in education. Petite, stylish, and spunky, Heidi is the "fun" one on cabinet. She has a great sense of humor and loves to laugh, but this vibrancy in her personality is balanced with a self-assured, matter-of-fact, no-frills approach to her work. Heidi describes her calm presence in the following quote:

Heidi: I—don't fly off the handle, I'm trying to give you words that I think other people would use to describe me too—I really sit back and analyze. You're not going to see me get all flustered. Um, I don't go from zero to sixty really quickly. I like to get the whole story. I'm not a last-minute person… Accessible. (Long pause.) I think [I'm] the calm in the storm. And you know I've heard Dr. Eisley say that [about me] before, just even-keel. And, you know, (lowers voice to serious level) I think your own life experiences have a direct effect on the type of person you are.

Heidi takes a lot of pride in her work at Greenfield. She is proud of the school that she led and she takes pride in Greenfield as a district overall. She is one of the

newest members on cabinet, and she described that while she loves her position, she misses being a school principal because it allowed her to form strong relationships with families. Her words express this sentiment:

> *Heidi: I loved being a principal. (laughs) I loved being a principal! I just—there are times—I had a moment right before winter break—I was in a building and I just—you know—I don't know…*
>
> *E: Yeah. So, you sometimes miss it?*
>
> *Heidi: Yes. I do. Oh I do, definitely. I miss the uh, direct contact with the kids, all of those direct contacts. The direct contact with the kids, um--the families. I loved all the family events! You know with elementary, and especially the school that I was in, you would get these little ones when they're four, we'd had their brothers and sisters, knew their parents, you knew—I mean—and I was there for a long time!*

Since she took on a role in the executive cabinet, Heidi has gained a new perspective for what it means to be a part of Greenfield. Heidi describes what she finds to be special about Greenfield in the following quote:

> *Heidi: I just see the level of commitment. One thing that has been different for me, in this position, is that I've attended more state-level meetings and I've attended meetings where I'm with more people of [similar] positions…For different administrators, and just seeing the excellence that we have here, and from everyone! I mean, that just doesn't happen, it has…It hasn't—Greenfield hasn't always been that way. Now I know when I first took my job in '87,*

Greenfield was just really coming about… Um, and I've [worked under] a number of different superintendents, and we've had some rough times…Um, but just always feeling like you're a part of something really, really great. I'm very proud of where you, where I work. It's from everyone—from the custodian to the superintendent. That legacy started with Dr. Hollis, and Dr. Eisley, I feel, has really added a deeper dimension to it and I'm not trying to, you know, brown-nose, I forget we're taping, I almost said something else! (laughs)

Linda Burton worked in radio and television journalism prior to joining the GPS executive cabinet in 1990 as the Senior Executive Director of Communications. She has a master's degree in education. Linda presents herself as very put-together, very-business, practical, logical, calm. Sometimes in cabinet I observed that she would play "dumb." She would ask questions that seemed obvious and basic. Much later, in an interview, without my prompting, she explained that she views her role in cabinet as one of devil's advocate. She explained that she often pretends to be the "ignorant" audience that this policy, statement, or idea will eventually reach. In this way, Linda proudly embodies the non-educator perspective on cabinet. She takes great pride in her profession; so much so that she was deeply concerned with her review of the transcript from her first interview. She viewed it as a journalist would, and she was highly critical of her word choice and intonation that was captured in the transcript. In fact, she asked if she could take a second stab at the same questions during our second scheduled interview. Notably, Linda was also the only interview participant who asked for the

protocol questions in advance. From my experience on the campaign, I knew this was a common practice when dealing with the media. In the following quotation Linda describes her work with district communications as a means of systematically building relationships that help create a cohesive culture between internal and external audiences:

> *Linda: Um, and then all the rest are just tools on how you do it. But it has to be systematic. And so…when people ask, "Oh! You're the, you're the person that deals with the media…that's your job?" Well, that is another part of my job…But, I don't see it as a central part of my job. It takes up a…a great deal of my time and more and more every day because of the changing, media… But I don't see it as "Oh you do the brochure. You're the Greenfield News lady. You do those things." Those are all tools, but it's coming up with a systemized method of keeping your ear to the ground on what the issues are, what the needs are of all of your constituents. And meeting those needs, and then communicating those needs. So that's where the piece comes in when you're part of the administration. I see it as, "Well, how is this going to play in Peoria?" (laugh) That's an old phrase of-of, "Well, this sounds good, but what does it mean? And how do you say that so people understand, and how do you…you say you're meeting a need…how do you know that? How do you assess that? Have we done any surveys? Have we had focus groups? Have we—have we met with key communicators, people in the community who are people that others respect that others pay attention to what they say…and kind of follow what they say…they're opinion-leaders… Do we know who those are? Have we*

identified those? Who is going to be that kind of person? Who's going to really tell us what's going on? Not just what we want to hear, but what's really going on. So, I try to be the person…who…who plays devil's advocate in cabinet (grins)… Um, and just…bottom line here what are we trying to do? It sounds good, this looks good, but what change is it going to affect? Is it, does, is it, is it worth the change? For the change's sake? Is it worth it?... I would say my main function is to establish and maintain a systematic approach to relationship-building between management…our internal audience, and our external audience. You can call them audiences or publics…And when I talk about internal publics, I am talking about…our site administrators, teachers, our support employees… And external audiences would be parents…patrons of the district, whether they have or have had kids in the district or not. Um, lawmakers, community and civic organizations, and our colleagues: other education institutions. Public, private schools, our higher ed. Those would be the main ones.

Presentation of Data Findings

Research Question 1: How do district leaders perceive the external social and political environment?

Overall, district leaders at Greenfield perceive the political environment to be hostile toward public schools. The data yielded three key pieces to this perceived hostility. The first key piece is the lack of public funding granted to schools. Second,

the leaders share the view that public schools are being threatened by the school choice movement. The third feature of this perceived hostility is the shared perception that their state has a long history of providing insufficient support to public schools.

All four interviewed participants specifically mentioned the inadequate funding provided to meet the regulatory demands placed on public schools by the state government. Heidi gave a recent example:

> *Heidi: You know—if anything, a policy will be written and there's no funding to go along with it... Um, you know, I'm thinking the recent [state legislation concerning student reading sufficiency] going on. Well, [students] might still be on an academic progress plan—an academic reading plan—but we're not getting any funding—extra funding—for [students] that still require the extra assistance that's written into the law!*

The second key piece of the perception of hostility was their shared view that public schools are under attack by the school choice movement. There was a consistent message communicated across cabinet meetings concerning the political support and general public interest in charter schools and school vouchers. Greenfield district leaders expressed concern for those students who were not "winners" in an education system organized around school choice. There was concern for students who did not have advocates to ensure that they had an equal opportunity to apply and be selected into charter schools. The district leaders also spoke of school choice in language that demonstrated an "us versus them" mentality. Dr. Richards explained:

Dr. Richards: I think they play into this larger narrative that schools are failing. And when we look at the data, charter schools aren't doing any better than public schools. In fact, they're doing worse in some cases. Yet, they have the ability to pick their kids. They have the ability to pick their school location. They have the ability to put all these requirements into play: parents have to volunteer, or kids have to come to summer school, or kids have to come to Saturday school, parents have to be at school for so many hours…and if you don't play by those rules…then you're out.

Dr. Richards went on to explain that while she believes charter schools are built on a model that cannot be sustained, they are a popular option because people are looking for an alternative to the "failing public schools." She adds that the school choice movement is waging a powerful public relations campaign with which public schools simply cannot compete. Dr. Richards' explanation below is exemplary of threads of conversation concerning charter schools that occurred throughout observations and interviews with Greenfield district leaders. She says:

Dr. Richards: So. What does a charter school do? It gives the illusion that it's an "apples to apples" comparison, these young little whipper-snappers… are hand-picking staff, making them work seventy hours a week, not letting them have a sub, not letting them go to the doctor, all of these things that they're doing, and then their data comes out dead even; a tiny bit better—maybe—sometimes worse [in comparison to public schools]…But the bottom line that comes out is that charter schools are better. Virtual schools: the same

thing…We're getting our ass kicked, excuse me, on communication…I mean it's a PR gimmick. And it's infuriating to me! Because if we ran ads in [local city magazines], like they do, and spent our money like that—people would crucify us! But, yet, people don't know that we won Science Olympiad. That our 8th graders won the 8th grade robotics competition…So, all they see are the, I don't know, the few little stories that we get in the paper or on social media. And those are only our fans who even pay attention to that.

E: So, at what point did you decide, you know, that this, this is a threat? That charter schools and this mind set?

Dr. Richards: When they started taking state aid. Virtual [schools]—same thing! …And we bus that kid to school, we provide them a teacher, we feed them breakfast, we have a counselor and nurse, we have an art program, we have music, we have PE, we have band and athletics, we have a ton of clubs, we feed 'em lunch, we bus 'em home…

Dr. Eisley makes similar remarks concerning the threat of school choice. He explains:

Dr. Eisley: I think we're under some threats right now. I think we're under threats in terms of being in a new way of educating students through vouchers, through choice, through charters, through virtual learning, and I believe very much that the foundation of our democracy rests and lies within a quality, you know, public education system. But what I sense is happening right now is that you have a lot of policy makers, as well as a lot of parents…that have…the

dichotomy between those who really believe in public education, versus those who do not, I think is, is—striking... I think it's going to continue to become greater. Because you're going to continue to have staunch advocates, supporters of public education, but then you're also going to have staunch supporters and advocates of "give me choice."

Heidi Buesking similarly speaks about the threat of charter schools:

Heidi: Vouchers aren't going to help anyone. Um. Charter schools: they don't have to follow the same rules. They can set their own rules. And, and then what do we have left?! What about the kids who are left?

E: So when did you notice this trend start to really happen?

Heidi: Right. Right. I'm going to have to say that really feeling the impact of it seven years ago. The last seven or eight years.

E: And what, what, what was the impact that you felt?

Heidi: Well, well…the big…well, the School Voucher legislation. You know, and I, I had a couple of parents that took advantage of that. But just seeing what that…just how unfair that was. To take that money, and then even the way it's taken and how the kids are weighted and the districts are only paid the top two weights, and just…and you know I know that's just been within the last four years with State Superintendent Danzeretti. Um, thinking that you know, with the charter schools, and when that was going to happen, there was a lot of fear behind it and what was going to happen…there was a lot of talk. I don't think I really felt a lot of impact of that. Not until the uh…school voucher legislation…

I will have to say it was scary right when Danzeretti came in. When she stepped in, it was scary at that point. We're hearing this and then we do see what happened with that. You know, there's still the lawsuit pending on it with the vouchers. Um. That is really scary.

Another key feature of this perceived hostility toward public schools in the external political context is district leaders' shared perception that their state has a long history of providing insufficient support to public schools. Three of the four interviewed participants specifically mentioned that throughout their entire educational careers in their state of residence, only once did they feel that the state government provided remotely adequate support to public schools, and three participants referred to the same instance in 1990: more than twenty years ago. Dr. Eisley's exemplary response follows:

E: In your career, in education, have you ever felt like the political climate or the state legislature, or the governor, or anyone—politically—has actually supported you?

Dr. Eisley: One time.

E: And what was it?

Dr. Eisley: 1990. House Bill [number]... So in 1990, um, House Bill [number] was passed to give education more money, teachers more money, and to lower class sizes. And in 1989 I had as many as forty-three students in a political science class [at that time Dr. Eisley was a classroom teacher at GPS] …Forty-three—world history class. It was a world history class actually at Greenfield

High School. Forty-three students! Only had thirty-five desks in my room. So the other eight kids sat on the floor and we took turns. I said to them, "I'll keep taking you all, but you have to share seats. And I'm not going to get in the middle of deciding who's sitting on the floor and who's sitting on a chair."

So in 1990, [the state] put a taskforce or a committee got together and, and said "We are going to, um, work toward creating better learning and working conditions for our schools…" That's the only time, Ellen, I have ever felt like – and that was a critical time in my career, because I had been in [this state] for five years, so all of a sudden, I'm losing hope, and all of a sudden, we did that, we get some more money. Yes, class sizes were starting to eventually get lower. But in my twenty years, that has only happened one time… It hasn't happened since. On the contrary, I feel like we are less supported and respected as a profession than ever before. And that's sad. [Long pause] I think our teachers would say that too. I think they have said it to us that their morale is at an all-time low. And, uh, we've got to—we've got to work to restore the honor and the respect that should come with being an educator. Our performance as a state has not been bad at all when you look at our ACT and what we've done. We've still got things a long way to go. But for what we're doing, based on the amount of money we're receiving, I think is absolutely amazing. I think if you were to do an algorithm based on looking at states—the investment the states have made for common education—the outputs—I think you'd find [this state] to be a heck of a product—that our education is a heck of a product.

Overall, these three key features demonstrate the language that the Greenfield district leaders shared concerning their perception that the state political environment is hostile toward public education. The perceived hostility is exemplified by the notion of inadequate funding provided to meet the policy demands placed on public schools by the state government, concern for a state and country that produces an education system organized around school choice, and a shared understanding of state history in which insufficient support has been provided to public schools.

Research Question 2: How do district leader perceptions of the external environment affect beliefs about the district's ability to go through a process of change?

Overall, while district leaders perceive the hostility as a significant challenge, they are determined that it will not stand as a barrier to the important work they do. The data again yielded three key pieces to this perception of perseverance in spite of the challenging environment. First, they view the Strategic Plan as a means to keep focused on the work at hand. Second, district leaders expressed a willingness to transform along with the needs of society. Lastly, they voiced their hope in developing creative means to work through the challenging environment.

The district leaders at GPS have developed a framework for their process of change: their Strategic Plan. This Strategic Plan keeps the district focused on the work at hand. Dr. Eisley led the development of the Strategic Plan before he took on the role of superintendent. He leans on the plan as the ultimate framework for decision making, and throughout interviews and observations, the other cabinet leaders also referred back to elements of the Strategic Plan. Most often cabinet members referenced, "the four

core components." These four components or the "core" are mentioned in the letter Dr. Eisley has attached to the front page of the Strategic Plan which can be found on the GPS webpage.

In the letter he writes, "Our emphasis on early childhood education, neighborhood schools, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), and Greenfield's University Quad experience plays a significant role in equipping our students to be successful beyond their high school years." The references to these core components are not lip service. As the cabinet members discuss their work, they intuitively use the Strategic Plan as the foundation for the understanding of their roles. All of this is to make the point, that regardless what the political climate looks like, the district leaders have a clear understanding of what GPS is setting out to do and they have a clear understanding of their role in that process of change.

In the following interview excerpt, Dr. Eisley explained that he cannot afford to ignore the political climate, but that it will not determine the trajectory of Greenfield:

E: I guess the question is: how much does the political climate influence your decision making?

Eisley: Um. I think it honestly depends on the issue at hand.

E: Can you give me one?

Eisley: Yeah, I can give you an example. Um. When the legislature wants to step in and try to micromanage the school district. You know saying that you have to have this or that requirement. But you know what? Schools—schools need to have the ability to make decisions that are best for the building and the community that they serve. Not necessarily the state stepping in saying, "You

know you should be doing this." Um. Again, they do impact us financially, when they don't fund us adequately. They harm us greatly. But do we say simply because we don't have money or that we're inadequately funded that we're not going to give our all to kids? Absolutely not. So, yes it affects us, but I don't think it ultimately determines our destiny as a district and what we want to do…

Dr. Richards shares a similar point of view. She explains that while the political climate may be unfriendly and volatile, and while there may be many distractions and external forces beyond the policies set by the state legislature, the district will rely on the framework to keep focused on the important work at hand:

Dr. Richards: Yeah, leadership [often] doesn't really stick with a plan. Did they consider that the legislature keeps changing the plan? ... But we have to focus on the sphere of influence. What are things within my control that I can do? And strategic planning is a big one. So that I can say "no" to a bunch of external forces that cause me to be like the little squirrel that's like, "OH! Shiny thing!" …You have to have that first level of decision-making that you've already got on that piece of paper that you've already included on the table.

The second key feature of district leaders' determination to persevere in spite of a perceived hostile political climate was their shared and emphasized willingness to transform along with the needs of society. The district leaders discussed their belief that society is constantly changing, and that as a service to society, public schools must be

flexible to its varying needs. In the following interview excerpts, Dr. Eisley discussed this constant change using the term "disruption," while Linda Burton delineated specific societal changes that schools must address in their work.

Dr. Eisley: Um, we're in a very interesting time right now in that public education has not been disrupted…yet…in a manner that I think it's going to be, Ellen. I think that-

E: Tell me what you mean by "disrupted."

Dr. Eisley: Well, I think that we're ripe for disruption. And what I mean by disruption, and of course defining it as the dictionary would, doing things that we're not used to seeing. And let me give you a couple examples of this… Um, you know if you are not willing to be open in public education to change, then we're in trouble. And I can give you business examples, and we can always go back and cite these. Blockbuster. You know there was a time when Blockbuster was very strong…60,000 employees and so forth. And people, you know that's what we did. We went to go rent. But we got tired of late fees. We got tired of the hassle of having to go to the store and deal with it… And you had companies like Netflix come up and say, "You know there's a new way of doing things here. You can check out these movies with a kiosk, right?" Then they moved from a kiosk now to doing it online. Smart TV. Where is Blockbuster today? They're gone. They don't even exist. And uh, so that's one example.... Public education isn't quite there yet, but I think we're ripe for that type of disruption, and it's

going to continue because people and parents, mainly, are going to want to have more choices.

E: So, is it going to be GOOD for public education? The disruption?

Dr. Eisley: I think time will tell. I think time will determine that. I think schools are going to have to change their paradigm about how we're delivering education…[A]nd I have to say that I think at Greenfield we're doing that. Through our GCA program, through our dual enrollment, um and I think through our career connect program that we've started this year. I think giving more choices and more relevance to their education are going to be key, so we're not forced into a disruptive state. And I think disruption can be good. I think in some ways it can be good. I like disruption, to a degree. I don't, I don't necessarily like disruptive forces that are going to force us to do things that are not necessarily going to be good for kids. And again, I don't know how all this will play out, but I do know this: that we will have to be willing to be flexible. We have to. If we are not thinking differently, and if we're not willing to change, then change is going to take us over in a manner that we probably will not necessarily like.

Linda Burton delineated specific societal changes that schools must address in their work:

Linda: What challenges do I think urban public school districts face in modern America? Social extremism. And I mean, economically, we're seeing the shrinking of the middle class. We're becoming very black and white: haves and

have-nots… Politically: right wing/left wing and no moderation in the middle. Religiously: my way or the high way… Uh, I think the changing family structure presents a challenge to school districts urban or otherwise…Grandparents and even great-grandparents are raising kids …You know, it's a challenge… it's one that we have to think about and we have to meet. We're going to have to change, but we're going to have to meet that change. Um. Challenges... You know I talked about the fact that society is seeing a growing distance between the haves and the have-nots. And really it just an example of the number of issues that we're facing, without funding support from our state government to meet those challenges. Even if we find a good way to do it, we apply things that we think will work. But we have to be able to fund them. And those issues are mobility rates: in this district we are facing that…Dropouts. Any dropout is too many. And our district's rates are particularly high compared to others, but around the country they are way too high. And we have some of those, we have that responsibility and we see that as an issue. Drop-out rates. Another challenge that we face is growing number of families with limited English: students with limited English, if-if-some that don't even have any English. Homelessness. Boy, not that long ago in my tenure you would never associate homelessness with Greenfield Public Schools. And then I think the ramifications from high stakes testing, especially flawed high stakes testing can be devastating. And that brings us to another challenge: and that is keeping morale high among teachers who are given more and more to accomplish each year while their compensation stays at or near the bottom of the list or the

rankings of the country. And that brings us to another problem: attracting new teachers in hard-to-place areas or just teachers in general! How do we keep them from going to [neighboring states]? Just around here? So how do we respond to those [challenges]? You can take any one of those: mobility rates, dropout rates, I think we're doing that in those four tenants. I think we're responding to all of those challenges. Broadly, in the four tenants, in the four main components of what this community has come up with as our plan…of action: our Strategic Plan… And that would be Early Childhood—get 'em young, get 'em started off on the right track, get their families involved early. Get them used to the idea of and give them opportunities to exceed with college and successful careers as the ultimate goal, early on…So, Early Childhood. Neighborhood Schools—providing those supports that-that-that throw obstacles in the way of learning and success. STEM—trying to meet those challenges of uh, critical thinking, problem solving, um, preparing for jobs that require collaboration, making their learning real world problem solving…All of those things that work across the board to ignite and interest in students to learn for purpose. A purpose to give them a purpose to learn and show them that learning is fun, succeeding is fun: failing is okay. We learn from failing. That's what's going to happen throughout your life. But how do you come back and solve this problem that's causing this failure? It-it-that-that-that is also a way of involving or collaborating a whole community… 100% Graduation, College and Career Readiness. It's all related. We offer all kinds of opportunities for kids to do well in school and these other steps and when they're ready to start

really planning for their careers, we give them opportunities for on-the-job experience, opportunities to learn- to take college uh, courses that count for college credit and high school requirements. We do whatever it takes to see that they pass the end-of-year instruction…that is a team effort. We change the structure of our schools to ensure we develop strong relationships with our families and keep them in the loop and having them help us help their kids succeed by getting to know their families.

Lastly, they voiced their hope in developing creative means to work through the challenging environment. The district leaders placed the greatest emphasis on the challenge of inadequate funding from the state government, and they work against that challenge by promoting a powerful bond issue campaign. They also work closely with philanthropists who are perceived as generous supporters to education reform initiatives in this state, and especially in Midwestern City. Both of these funding streams allow Greenfield leaders the means to implement the core components of the Strategic Plan, which in turn, allows them to defend against the external demands and barriers to their process of change. In the following excerpts, Dr. Eisley, Linda Burton, and Dr. Richards all speak about the focus on the bond issue:

Dr. Eisley: For the next six weeks we're focusing on the bond issue, bond issue, bond issue. Um. That is priority one, um, for my office because we have to pass that in order to have um, money…and the bonding capacity to do our capital improvements, and really we have to have that to keep our Strategic Plan going. So Phase Two of [and intermediary school], getting ready to build [the new]

Elementary…Having the operational dollars to build our technology, for textbooks, for STEM related activities, basic operational costs…all that's tied to the bond issue.

E: So what's a campaign that you're working on right now? Or project?

Linda: Bond election campaign! And also at the same time, STEM… And…most everything is kind of on the back burner… until the Bond is over.

E: So what two presentations have you had?

Dr. Richards: Bond.

E: Ohh, bond…so you do those and Dr. Eisley?

Dr. Richards: Oh, we all do them. [referring to all cabinet members]

E: Oh you do? So, where were you?

Dr. Richards: At the service center, I did two this morning.

In this excerpt, Heidi Buesking talks about the importance of the philanthropic relationships Greenfield has made:

E: How would you characterize this district's relationship with the [local philanthropies]…Because Midwestern City's foundations, I mean we have some very active, huge money sources here…so how does Greenfield benefit or not from that?

Heidi: I—we have to—and I have to tell you, Dr. Richards is the expert at this, and I've seen her work with them. Um. We are not a district of programs. And

so a lot of times what I've seen with some of the philanthropic groups that have the funds, they will see national programs, they will look at different things that have happened, and we have a couple of programs: KidsFirst—that's funded by the Adelmann Founation. But, we're not always interested in the program[s proposed by the foundations]. And so that's where we have to balance it. We have to be able to show that what we are doing is really working with the way we have developed it. We don't have to purchase a…you don't have to purchase a big program for us to use. But we're dealing with people who want to see outcomes… And data… Hard facts. And so it's easy to look at program and look at the hard facts. That's not the way we work…here…And so there is a little massage of…and explaining of what we do.

In this excerpt, Dr. Richards further explains that the philanthropic interests are not allowed to supersede the focus of the Strategic Plan, no matter how much money is being offered.

Dr. Richards: And then we say, "I'm sorry, Mr. Philanthropist. I'm sorry, Board Member. Remember, we can't chase this little rabbit because…"

E: So do you actually say that to philanthropists?

Dr. Richards: Oh my gosh! Yes! We tell people "No" all the time.

E: So how does that feel?

Dr. Richards: Oh gosh, it feels--actually it feels--it's very--they respect it a lot. But you have to go through and explain it…People say, "You know, we keep making these programs available to you guys, and you're not taking it. Yet, you

say you need assistance. Why aren't you taking these programs?" And so, it's very easy to say, "Our Strategic Plan articulates our priorities. There's only so much bandwidth for change. We have committed, based on data, with many stakeholders to these four priorities. So if it doesn't fit into our philosophy and it doesn't fit into our four core, then while it may be a phenomenal idea, and while it may work wonderfully in another place, we can't implement this with fidelity." So we're for—the analogy I always use—is we're not a buffet line. We're not the Golden Corral…We're a gourmet meal. It has to…everything on the plate needs to make sense and needs to work together. So, we're not…don't throw me the buffet…You know, and people look at me [gives a quizzical look]…you can get fried rice, lasagna, and a chicken fried steak, and a side of Jello, okay? [But] what's the quality, and are those things even compatible?! You know, I, I, so, let us do what you tell us to do. Let us focus. Let us go for quality. Let us monitor our work with data. Let us look at this continuous improvement cycle so that we know what works, and then let us take those things to scale.

Dr. Eisley explains the same message in the following quote:

Dr. Eisley: I think schools are programs-rich and systems-poor…Um, and that's the challenge for schools. We don't have abundant resources available to us. So you can't, and you simply should not just, "Let me just buy this program, program, program, program (snaps fingers) and try, try, try it." If the program, first of all is not going to be, um, a compliment to your core and to

your Strategic Plan, you don't even want it. And, trust me, we have a core. And there are a lot of programs across this country who will say "Hey! Why don't you try this, we'll give this to you at this discounted price," And we have philanthropists who will say, "Hey, let us buy this program for you." And, unfortunately, sometimes we have to say "Thanks, but no thanks because it doesn't espouse to what our core mission is."

Research Question 3: How do district leaders communicate their beliefs about the effects that the external environment has on the district's ability to change?

There is a consistent, continual, common language that is employed throughout communications between district leaders and the various role groups with whom they frequently communicate. The findings for this research question are broken down into the messages that are relayed to five role groups: fellow cabinet members, principals and teachers, school board, parents and the community, and the media. The overall findings are summarized at the end of this section.

How do district leaders communicate their beliefs about the effects that the external environment has on the district's ability to change <u>to each other in cabinet?</u>

In every cabinet meeting, state politics were discussed. Usually, Dr. Eisley would open the meeting with some recent article concerning public education. He would circulate articles about topics like vouchers, the state mandated school accountability system (manifested in a "grade" for every school), current legislative questions, and so on. This regular heated discussion in cabinet provided the leaders in the room with an opportunity to practice communicating their shared viewpoint. The observer found that

many of the same messages discussed in cabinet were relayed to other role groups: often, it was precisely the same wording. This exercise in cabinet allowed the leaders a safe space to discuss the challenges. The tone was one of frustration more than optimism, but it was also marked by a tone of "we will persevere." The following three narratives exemplify this common cabinet experience and the way it is used to create shared perspectives and reinforce the shared language.

In this first narrative Dr. Eisley circulated an article about the "grades" assigned to schools across the state, per the new state-mandated school accountability system. A discussion ensued concerning how to effectively communicate to the larger Greenfield community that these "grades" are not considered a legitimate indicator of the work being done in Greenfield schools. The discussion centered on creating a newsletter that would serve as a response to the grades, the newsletter would highlight the successes of Greenfield. At the end of the excerpt, Dr. Eisley jokes that the newsletter looks so good that the State Superintendent will want to use it as a dartboard, insinuating that she wants the public backlash from the accountability system to actually cause harm to public schools.

> *Dr. Eisley: Here's the District Report Card: it is finally official. We got a B-minus; I noticed that a charter school in Midwestern City got an F---too bad. One parent complained that we're trying to hide the grade: but we're really only now just getting the official report: we're not trying to hide anything.*
> *Dr. Richards: Our Department just had a big discussion about the report card: What it's supposed to do, what we're in support of and what we don't support.*

Why expect the public to know anything about it, if we don't have our own knowledge and elevator speech?

Linda: Grand Valley [area rival school district] put out some literature that was too in depth. We'd like to put out something to inform people and to practice.

Dr. Eisley: (Looking at the draft of the newsletter Linda designed) Amazing stuff: don't be afraid to let this stuff shine. We don't have the big money out there that the for-profits [have. This is] what we're doing that's working: it's a response to A-F, putting a positive spin on what is actually going on in schools. The [newsletter] also captures a great diversity here: KidsFirst program, neighborhood schools, and College and Career…Danzeretti will use it [the newsletter] as a dart board here I'm sure. (laughter)

In this second excerpt, Dr. Eisley starts the meeting with a discussion about the new charter schools opening up in Midwestern City PS. He uses language that implies the danger that charter schools pose to the common good. This language and tone is shared by the other cabinet members and specifically documented in interviews with the three interview participants. The danger lies in their shared belief that school choice, based on the market model, will inevitably create or exacerbate the dichotomy between "haves" and "have-nots."

Dr. Eisley: Midwestern City PS heard from three new charter schools (then he begins going over an article he clipped from the paper). They have two hundred and fifty kids, three administrators in one charter school. These charters will be a part of the public school system. That just means that the public system is

responsible for the site expenses while the charter system is responsible for the teaching and administrative expenses. Charter school corporations are the ones who benefit… [This is] de jure segregation! We are re-segregating America one step at a time. The law allows for it. Brown v. Board of Ed said "separate but equal has no place in public education," then ten years later another case, "Collins" ruled that it's okay for students not to be bussed outside of their district. This made it so that suburbs could stay separate from the urban centers. Charters and vouchers are just re-segregating!

In this last example, Dr. Eisley opens cabinet with a reminder to stay informed about the upcoming State Superintendent election. He follows the reminder with news about a scandal in the State Department of Education as the State Superintendent's days in office dwindle. She was defeated in the primary election, so she is a sitting duck during this time leading up to the general election. Additionally, Dr. Eisley mentions an article written about a fellow district superintendent in another region of the state whose district had a drastic downturn in the "grade" assigned by the state accountability system and the downturn was attributed to the district's increase in accepting special education transfer students. Dr. Eisley explains that he admires the stance this district superintendent is taking, and he sent the superintendent a note of encouragement, and Dr. Eisley specifically mentions the solidarity of "Greenfield language."

Dr. Eisley: A few things on the agenda: State Superintendent forum will be held on October 30 at Hidden Falls. It's so refreshing to have two candidates who

have the backbone to clean this place up. Last week, Danzeretti [discussion of scandal in the State Superintendent's office]…

Dr. Richards: She's doing in front of the public what we [educators] have been seeing for years…

Dr. Eisley: (Referring to a district superintendent whose district went from an A to an F in two years. An article in another newspaper was recently written about the instance.) This superintendent accepted all the special ed students—there were a lot of transfers…and [consequently this district] went to an F. The reporter asked this superintendent "What are your thoughts about receiving this grade?" His response was "We're just going to go out there and show them how you can succeed. And I don't care what they're going to do to our school; we're going to continue accepting special ed students." So, I sent him a little note, told him they are talking the Greenfield language and we support him and the stance he's taking. (The cabinet members nod heads in approval and agreement).

How do district leaders communicate their beliefs about the effects that the external environment has on the district's ability to change <u>to principals and teachers?</u> District leaders officially meet monthly with secondary and elementary principals together at the administrators' meetings. These meetings keep principals informed about general happenings across the district, but they also serve as an occasion to further indoctrinate the next level of leadership with the common language concerning Greenfield's response to the demands of the political context. This common

language again centers on the idea of "while many external barriers exist, we will persevere because we are driven by a mission of 100% Graduation, College and Career Ready." Likewise, the cabinet leaders expressed the expectation that this message they deliver to principals and teachers should be ingrained and shared across the GPS community. In addition to monthly administrator meetings, members of cabinet had frequent formal and informal interactions with principals providing support in whatever department they led. In the following section, I include excerpts from her observations at Leadership Greenfield, a professional development class offered to teachers who have been picked out as future leaders of GPS; at the Greenfield School Year Kick-off ceremony, which was a student-led kickoff for all the principals and teachers; one of the monthly administrative meetings; and her interviews with cabinet members.

In this first excerpt, Dr. Richards takes the opportunity at a Leadership Greenfield class to embolden star teachers (being prepped for principal-ship) with Greenfield Pride, she then introduces three current principals who talk about having a "we can" attitude, no matter what demands and barriers are placed on educators, they embody a "we will persevere" spirit:

> *Dr. Richards: Greenfield is great only because we have fabulous people like you. So we want to reach out and help our colleagues. Programs don't save children. Buildings don't save children…People do. We want our students to have the best regardless of politics, common core, etc. the difference is the stuff that's going on in the classroom"*
>
> *(Dr. Richards introduces one of the principals who talks about the attitude he brings to his work:)*

He says: We have a 'we can' attitude…my success depends on teachers, custodians, students, showing up with desire to learn, support staff…Back in the old days we were put on the "needs to improve" list. We came at it like we're going to do whatever it takes ... Here, now, we have three principals in one building. They have to share leadership. There was no blueprint. We created this… We worked a whole summer to figure out the logistics: bringing teachers together, shared leadership, [that's when] "magic happens."

The Greenfield School Year Kickoff has an air of electricity that buzzes through the high school auditorium, which is akin to the size of small university theatre. Teachers from all the schools in the district are in attendance. The sense of Greenfield Pride is alive; I noted that it was literally a pep rally for teachers. There were not even enough seats in the auditorium for everyone, I had to stand. The Kickoff is led by high school drama students, and the spirit teams all have the opportunity to perform. The school board president spoke, Dr. Eisley spoke, and there is recognitions for the teacher of the year and the support staff person of the year. I requested a hard copy of Dr. Eisley's Kickoff speech, and his administrative assistant, Eileen, shared the six page document. In his speech geared toward an audience of principals and teachers embarking on a new school year, he highlights the mission of Greenfield, the perseverance against hostile political forces, the essentiality of the core components of the Strategic Plan, and necessity of taking pride in who they are as Greenfield and as public educators. All of these themes are constantly being discussed and developed in

the safe space of cabinet. The following are excerpts from the speech, and the entire speech can be found in Appendix E.

In this introduction of the speech, Dr. Eisley reminds teachers of the ethical imperative of their work:

> *We belong to a profession of hope – a district that believes in its students and in possibilities – a culture that respects the potential of young people and values the efforts of staff that work on behalf of society at large. I say this to you because we can't take what we do in our profession for granted or forget the importance of what we are trying to do with our audacious goal of 100 percent graduation, college and/or career ready. We are literally in the business of changing lives and families for generations to come.*

In this excerpt, Dr. Eisley situates the work of public educators in this hostile political context:

> *Unfortunately it is not a good political climate for public education and for educators and I am most perplexed as to how we got here! We continue to see national and state policies aimed at demoralizing teachers, undermining the traditional governance of boards of education, re-segregating American communities and reducing the dynamic nature of learning to a testing obsession. There are also forces today that are trying to harm public education by stripping valuable resources and trying to influence the opinion that public education is a dismal failure. These are serious threats that have already undermined what we know about good teaching and learning. We know that*

focus on the whole child can't simply be measured by a multiple-choice test that determines whether a student can graduate or move on to the fourth grade. We know that tying teacher pay to student test scores has never worked and yet policy makers are eager to promote this idea. It is time they quit using our public education system as a political pawn.

During one of the monthly administrative meetings, Dr. Eisley prepared principals for the reality of the school grades. He explained why they do not believe the grades are indicative of the work that is actually taking place in Greenfield schools. Usually, the district leaders speak to the principals at the monthly administrative meetings with a tone of optimism, but this discussion was laced with discontent. He ends his talk with a warning to principals to be prepared to answer questions from parents and the community—the expectation is that principals are able to articulate the same messages that he and the other cabinet members constantly articulate. In the room, the principals took on an air of solidarity. I noted that the principals were not only willing to comply with this expectation, but they wanted to be as informed as possible, because they were proud of their schools and they wanted to defend their good work.

Dr. Eisley: Let's talk about the release of school grades (referring to the school letter grade state system for evaluation). We do have to talk about it because they are coming out this week. Let me be <u>very</u> clear, any elementary school across the state will be at a disadvantage this year with the grades. We do not believe that this grade is indicative of the quality of education at our schools…

There are other detrimental changes that were made and that affect the grade. Special needs students will be taking the same test as their peers. When you have a smaller "n" it accentuates the discrepancies of the evaluation system. Obviously, the high school has a larger "n" and the grades are better in the higher grade levels… I will tell you professionally, and personally, I'm sorry we're doing this. It doesn't make sense for schools, for economic development: It doesn't make sense at any level. Our data have proven over and over again that no matter where the child starts out, if they stay with our district, they will find success… There's no business out there that looks at one or two indicators to explain the whole picture… Sites, prepare yourselves because we're going to have four Fs, and you all are going to take the brunt of this from the community.

In an interview with Heidi Buesking, I noted Heidi's expectation that Greenfield educators stay informed about the political context and how it affects public education. She explained that that expectation began with the previous superintendent, Dr. Hollis, and has been carried on with Dr. Eisley, and the expectation is really a part of the professional culture at Greenfield:

E: So do you know anyone in this district who acts like "Well, you know, I don't really care about that stuff?"

Heidi: I really don't! I really, really don't. I feel that the support… Dr. Eisley keeps everyone [informed], and the expectation that if you're under Dr. Eisley then you're keeping everyone that you're working with informed of what is happening: nationally, in your own state, how that's impacting education…We

want people working who, here in public schools, who want to be in public schools… When [the previous superintendent] Dr. Hollis came in… she was VERY political herself. And so I never [before] really saw that [political] side of education. I always—I guess I always felt like you tell me what to do and I'll do it. I didn't really know that I had that much of a voice. Um, and Dr. Hollis shared that with us…So, I do feel like that is part of our Greenfield Way. We keep everyone informed and updated on what's going on and how that is affecting you… And I think they really have some, um…Teachers feel really responsible. I mean, all employees feel really real responsibility. It's not just up to the administrators to tell you what to do.

How do district leaders communicate their beliefs about the effects that the external environment has on the district's ability to change <u>to the school board?</u> The cabinet members meet with one or two school board members through "subcommittees" on a rotating monthly basis. This is a means for school board members to see how decisions are made at the district leadership level; it gets school board members involved in the complexity of the operations of a school district. Dr. Eisley explained it as, "an opportunity for board members to get involved in the discussion and gain understanding." Usually two or three cabinet members who lead departments that are concerned with the purpose of this subcommittee are also present in the meetings. Even in these "themed" meetings, the opening discussion usually concerns state politics. These discussions re-iterate the message that the political environment is hostile, but we are focusing on our mission to provide a high-quality education to every student.

In one subcommittee meeting, the discussion began concerning teacher pension reform across the state, and then it inevitably turned toward the accountability system with the A-F grades assigned to Greenfield schools. Dr. Richards explained to the board members present that one way Greenfield will persevere in the face of the political hostility is through the proper training of new educators:

> *Dr. Richards: The State Department of Education is comatose; let's make sure that people understand that in light of the [school evaluation system] that we're dealing with…We want to train educators who are new to the district, and get them to know The Greenfield Way, we want to spend more time with them in the vision-casting piece so they're understanding of the new direct we want to go: Always go back to the mission of 100% graduation.*

During another subcommittee meeting, there was an opening discussion about Common Core Standards, and parent opt-out options in the field testing. Dr. Eisley began discussing the effect that Common Core standards are having on the political discourse. This discussion, again, is indicative of the effort the cabinet members make to keep each other on the same message and their effort to keep board members informed about their viewpoints:

> *Dr. Eisley: I was at [a] conference and there was someone there from [another state] telling about what is happening over there. And they're saying, and now our state is saying, "We're going to create our own Common Core, we'll go above and beyond and that will be more rigorous." I don't know what that*

means under the current leadership. In light of the current election for State Superintendent, I don't know what to tell people right now…

Dr. Richards: If we were doing [State Developed Standards] instead of Common Core, we weren't going to suffer some penalty. Now we really do feel like we're going to be put to the edge of a razor blade if we don't use the set of standards. We want to be smart about this, but we don't know what we're investing in…

How do district leaders communicate their beliefs about the effects that the external environment has on the district's ability to change <u>to parents?</u> There are several means by which the district leaders communicate with parents: there is an up-to-date district webpage upon which superintendent's messages and letters are posted, the superintendent meets with some schools' PTAs, and every year a bond campaign is waged, district leaders meet with parents and community members at their schools to present the bond information. Mostly, I observed that the first line of district communication to parents does not come from the cabinet level; it extends from a principal or teacher. Hence the expectation that principals and teachers are on the same message that cabinet members are on concerning the perseverance in spite of external political barriers. The following are excerpts from a bond presentation to parents at an elementary school, a PTA meeting, and a meeting between the superintendent and the Parent Legislative Action Group (PLAG) leader.

In this bond campaign presentation, Dr. Eisley communicated his viewpoint that the political context is largely hostile toward public schools, therefore parents and the

community need to support the bond so that Greenfield can continue to do the excellent and important work it does:

> *Dr. Eisley: What's happening at the state level? There's a lot of talk right now about doing something for public education. We lose $5.6 million a year, that's huge in terms of lowering our class sizes. We are running out of teachers. There are thirteen openings in GPS. More than forty openings in Midwestern City PS and CCPS…We're not just going to hire bodies. Are we going to support this [talk about a political rally for education]? Absolutely. How are we going to be supportive? I have to be careful how I talk about this because there's a state superintendent who would love to "jerk my certificate." They are getting the message loud and clear that we're last in the region. The state owes you something. Our state has a modest tax burden. The Governor wants to cut income tax: by doing that, [the governor] will also cut schools.*

At this PTA meeting at Washington Elementary in GPS, Dr. Eisley discusses the state accountability system; he uses the same language he uses in cabinet, with teachers and principals, and with school board members. He explains that public education should be held accountable by the public, but that the evaluating indicators should be fair and reliable. He again laments that the current school evaluation system is inaccurate and harmful:

> *Dr. Eisley: I tell you what, we have great stuff happening here. The Washington Post has caught on, NYTimes, Standford, even Ellen—our PhD student—is looking at what we're doing that is special and trying to pinpoint it… Washington has an A, and I want to confirm that while I do think you all are*

doing "A" work, I think there are others schools also doing "A" work that didn't receive that grade. Don't put meaning on those grades. This grade has no weight whatsoever-- other than the way it makes you feel. And get ready: because when they put the NCLB guidelines back on us, since we didn't get the federal waiver, this school will be under the Needs to Improve list. As a matter of fact, 90% of all schools in this state will be on the Needs to Improve list…This is the madness our state has created. There's got to be a better way to evaluate schools. I'm not against accountability. We need accountability. I emailed some of our state legislators and the chambers and I plan to send a letter to the governor as well. This is ludicrous… We are all about continuous improvement. There's another part of this grade that I am diametrically opposed to. We should not be using students' test scores as evaluations for teacher effectiveness…Schools, public education: it is the greatest equalizer we have.

In addition to the PTAs, there is a Parent Legislation Action Group (PLAG). It is organized by parents with the purpose of keeping parents informed of the political climate. The leader of this group meets with Dr. Eisley once a semester to discuss viewpoints that the observer learned were mostly shared. Again, this meeting serves as a bridge for a common message: the more the cabinet talks with people, including parents, the higher the likelihood that viewpoints will be exchanged and in turn, shared. This parent and Dr. Eisley agreed that the accountability system is a barrier to helping schools become more effective:

Dr. Eisley to PLAG parent*: This is going to be an interesting dance for me. Balancing my views on teacher evaluation and my advocacy for teacher pay. People can twist it into me saying something like: "I want teachers to be paid more and I don't want them held accountable for their job." The thing is: I DO want teachers to make more money. I DO want them to be effective teachers, too. I don't want teachers to be evaluated by student test scores. Teachers don't get to pick their students, a student's test score is not a measure of the teacher's ability to teach… I'm tired of our students and schools being played as political pawns. It's a shame because if you look at states that are doing well economically, they all have one common denominator: they all invest in public education. I'm very disappointed with big business, the plutocrats better be aware in terms of what's happening. You know, [another state] is re-segregating and something like 70% of their schools are charter schools. The whole idea of choice and charters is de jure segregation. We're going to see politicians being bought out. The middle class who can afford it will move their children to private schools. It's going to be very different for our state. Public schools will still be here, but who will attend the schools?*

How do district leaders communicate their beliefs about the effects that the external environment has on the district's ability to change <u>to the media?</u> The Director of the Communications department, Linda Burton, spoke very candidly about how she deals with the media. The message itself is basically the same message that the district leaders are spreading to all role groups: this political climate is hostile, but we

will fight it with our adherence to this ethical mission of providing a quality education to 100% of our students. Rather than getting into the nuts and bolts about the message itself; however, she explained that there is skill in just working with the media so that reporters don't try to distort the message the district wants to relay. Linda spoke about journalists trying to grab "flashy stories" rather than getting to the root of a story and going in depth. She spoke about the danger of this distortion, in part because people are not getting the full story, and in part because it's "gotcha journalism" which is not friendly to the school district. Linda explained that her role is to build strong relationships with journalists so that they trust her information just as much when the story is a tough one as they do when it is light and easy.

> *Linda: Relationship-building. My-my part in dealing with the media is to make sure that we build relationships with those who are…who are covering us…And, so that when we have hard things that we want to explain… and those kinds of things that they trust that what you do tell them is what you can tell them: that it is truthful, and that you will tell them what you can when you can. So. It's relationship-building…They're looking for someone who can translate for them…It has to be…it's harder to build relationships especially with television people because of the transiency and because of the nature of what they're after…They're really after headline grabbing- uh- visual things. They need somebody on camera whether the person they get on camera knows a thing about what they're talking about or not. That's why it's important that when we have an issue that we go on camera as much as we can because the tendency is that they'll catch somebody:…at a [gas station] next to one of our schools and*

ask them if they are a parent and they might be or they might…just tell them what the story is and ask them how they feel about it. And what you get is nothing important, but flashy and a bad impression…

The overall finding for this research question involves this thread of language that begins in cabinet and is sewn throughout district communications with all role groups. This language is centered on the notion that the district will stay focused on its mission of 100% Graduation, College and Career Readiness despite the hurdles placed around them from the external political environment. The language is practiced and honed in cabinet. The leaders then spread the message to principals, teachers, the school board, parents, and the media. It is through this constant sharing of the message that viewpoints are exchanged and eventually shared.

Research Question 4: How do district leaders perceive the internal social, political, structural environment of the district?

Four key perceptions about the composition of the internal context emerged from the data. First is the perception that the Greenfield student demographic has undergone a drastic transformation. Second, the leaders share the perception that the Greenfield community has lots of Greenfield pride. Third, the district leaders alluded to their determined effort to recruit and maintain a quality body of educators. The fourth shared perception is that cabinet is like a family with honest disputes, but a general sense of "togetherness." Additionally, because the district structure is flat, issues are better addressed because they're being addressed at the source. The following sections provide evidence for each of these perceptions. Together, these four key perceptions

demonstrate one overall finding that the district leaders view the internal context as a strength—it forces the district to overcome barriers and strive for excellence far beyond any challenges put forth by the external context.

1. Change in Greenfield Demographics: Greenfield has undergone major internal transformations in terms of the student body being served and the best means to serve it. The students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (FRL) status have increased by more than 40% in the last ten years. In 2004, the percent of Greenfield students qualifying for FRL was 27.51%, in 2009 44.31%, and in 2014, 69.42% of the Greenfield students qualified for FRL. The following quotations illustrate the shared perception that Greenfield went from being a rural district, to a high-middle income/majority white district, to a district that serves students of a wide variety of racial, economic, and social backgrounds.

In this excerpt, Linda Burton tells me about the first transition of the student demographic at Greenfield. It shifted from serving a small, rural community to one that was quickly becoming middle class. Therefore, the board hired a superintendent at that time to develop the "sophistication" of the staff and structure of Greenfield:

> *Linda: And his mission was to make tough changes in hiring, and, as I said to kind of bring up the standard sophistication. It was a quickly growing, a suburban district then. And the clientele, the parents, were middle to upper-middle class…And…the system was still more…not rural…but the kind of thinking was more…uh…family. In that…lots of people were related who worked here… So, that had to be changed. So it was a cultural change, making*

it more from a small-town school district to a more sophisticated urban school district. Both in the way it was run and in the attitudes that…people had.

In this quote, Dr. Eisley spoke to the PTA at one elementary school. He explained that the district has changed to one that currently serves two distinct groups of students: the wealthy and the economically diverse, and this change is a positive one:

Dr. Eisley: There is definitely something unique here. I have seen us change dramatically over time. We have wealthy and we have poor-- and we're much better today than we were.

Here, Dr. Eisley speaks to the teachers at the Leadership Retreat, again he explains that the district was once much more homogenous than it is today, and that the diversity is an attribute:

Dr. Eisley: Greenfield went from being a white, wealthy district, I mean-- I drove a car that was not as nice as many of the cars our students drove! Now we're more colorful and beautiful than we've ever been. How do we ensure that parents want to come here that we're not an everyday regular public school? What are we capable of and where do we want to be? We've got to go 100% graduation rate. 45% FRL at the time and we have high mobility and ELL we're getting poorer, not wealthier.

Dr. Richards explained to me that when she was first hired 15 years ago, her major responsibility was to figure out how to serve the one demographically diverse school in the district; interestingly, she adds that Greenfield as a whole, now looks like that single school did in 2000:

Dr. Richards: We were pretty much homogenously white: middle class, upper-middle class. So. Everything was working. The only "problem" we had was Lewis Elementary. Lewis was very diverse. It was as diverse then as the district is now, demographically. And it was seeing struggles from that. And so they stuck out like a sore thumb. So the reason I was hired … was because I was supposed to go fix it.

2. Greenfield Pride. Throughout the data collection, reduction, and analysis the theme of Greenfield Pride was predominant. It is an integral piece of understanding the district leaders' perception of the internal context of the district. This sense of pride leeched into almost every interaction I had with the district leaders. In this first quote, Dr. Richards is speaking to the principals at a monthly administrators' meeting. She relays a little vignette about taking a British acquaintance to one of the Greenfield pep rallies and just how captivated she was at the ceremony and specifically that she was impressed with the equal amount of rambunctiousness and reverence among the students:

Dr. Richards: So, the dean of State University Med School is a Greenfield parent, and she was with another woman who is brand new to Midwestern City from Cambridge. And when I told them that I was headed to the pep rally they both asked if they could join me. I said, sure, but reminded them that it was really just a pep rally. But, let me tell you, it was really interesting to see them as they watched our traditions! They were impressed that we celebrated other areas besides football, they were impressed with the size of our football team,

they were impressed with the [mascot traditions], and they were impressed when we sang the national anthem how these wild and rowdy kids stood silent. It's something that you just can't explain.

Linda Burton talks about the importance of the "Greenfield Way" among students, she explains this pride is systematically cultivated, and constantly reinforced. She explains that it is pervasive, even Greenfield alumni hold on to that sense of pride. Linda also likens the pride to that of a college football fan base:

Linda: What is the culture? I think it's one of um—(long pause)--um--one of high expectations…because of its history and pride, its excellence…And I think pride is a big part of it. I think our kids--it's amazing how they take pride in their t-shirts and…claiming that they go to Greenfield. Our graduates come back and tell us…you know, I've had, we have interns working in this building and they tell us, um, that when they go to college, you know, people have a lot of respect for Greenfield. And they say, "Oh! You-you went to Greenfield!" …It is still a real community because the schools unify the families that are in this area. It's the schools that make (taps table) this area, you know, what it is. So it's a real community--community spirit! …And [it's also] alumni… It's reinforcing the Greenfield Way… I think our culture is, again, systematically reinforced in that a lot of what we do in STEM, and in…College and Career Ready--We have our kids evangelizing to younger kids… and that's part of what they do as athletes, they go in and mentor younger kids about the importance of school…Every 5th grader goes to the Greenfield University Quad [on a field

trip]. And the older kids are their… escorts … and they talk to them about what they need to do to get there and take these really cool classes. So, I think it's a way of keeping the Greenfield Way-- which is quality, excellence, the best you can be-- going. And I think, I think symbolically, the teachers, the older kids teach the younger kids to "Shoot the G" (Linda raises her hands into the shape of the letter G: a gesture that is often shown at Greenfield athletic events)…And in our department, we get pictures of them "shooting the G" and we reinforce that. Sense of pride. It's, it's almost like the Texas Longhorns…And, that would be a great thing to kind of have that Texas-swag (said with emotion). And I think there's a bit of that swag here at Greenfield.

The Greenfield pride is termed, "The Greenfield Way," and this term is as much a part of the constant common language as any discussion of the political barriers faced by schools. Heidi Buesking explains that the Greenfield Way is difficult to describe, but that Greenfield people know when something does or does not jive with the expectation of excellence that the Greenfield Way embodies:

Heidi: You know the Greenfield Way, to say that's the Greenfield Way it involves everything from our Greenfield Way of curriculum, the Greenfield Way of running a school, the Greenfield Way of um a (excited!) pep assembly! The Greenfield Way of a football game! The Greenfield Way of our culture, of how we treat each other…Um. (long pause) You know, we can look at something and know when it's not the Greenfield Way… I can look at something and go,

"Mmmm…that's not the way we do it in Greenfield. That's not the way it would work."

3. Professional Development. There is a repeated theme of district leaders lamenting the decline in the quality of the pool of educators, one key feature of the internal context is the Greenfield effort to recruit and continually develop high quality educators. The following quote from Dr. Richards provides insight into the effort made to place newly hired employees in the right school with the right colleagues:

Dr. Richards: What are we trying to do? And so my responsibilities [include] hiring the very best principals we can possibly find and be[ing] very strategic in where we put these principals and making…It's really like match-making. People laugh when you say that, but really a lot of thought and care goes into who is going to be where and why, and what skill set they bring to the table. And there's a ton of thinking that happened last year as far as what we're going to be doing this year when it comes to principal placement. Because it's so critical, as you well know…Creating a team, so that if you have somebody who is a data head, you've got to have somebody who has emotional intelligence to take care of the staff while they're checking things off the list.

4. Greenfield has a flat organizational structure and cabinet is like a family. The members of cabinet sometimes have competing interests, and they are very invested in the interests of their respective departments in part because the structure of the district is flat. This means that the cabinet members work closely with their

departments, perhaps more closely with their respective departments than with the central office. Nonetheless, they always agree that they are serving the common goals of the district. This sense of shared responsibility creates a deep sense of camaraderie, and helps quell the sense of isolation that comes from holding a leadership position.

In Dr. Richards' quote, she explains that her department works well because there is a sense of trust, which alleviates the necessity of bureaucratic oversight:

> *Dr. Richards: We're for solving the problem at the lowest level. We have competent…the reason our tiny little structure at the Service Center works, the reason we can have so few people in teaching and learning, is that we have phenomenal people in the building. So when everyone makes decisions, you don't have a lot of oversight. When there is a lot of oversight, there is a lack of trusting people to do what they're supposed to do, or they're not, they're not executing on the goal.*

In this interview excerpt, Heidi talks about how surprised she was at the responsibility of cabinet. She explains that as a principal, she did not appreciate the decision-making that goes on at the district level. The structure of the district is flat; therefore, cabinet members really know what's going on, just as much as the principals:

> *Heidi: I, you know, this is my second year on cabinet. It's funny because I actually had no clue to the responsibility of cabinet, prior to being on cabinet…When I was a building-level principal, and definitely when I was a teacher, I had no idea! Just that I knew there was a cabinet. And, the sense of shared responsibility, um, is, what I have realized now that I'm on it…I cannot*

believe that there are 11 of us that make all of the decisions of the district! (looks with disbelief and laughs.) It kind of-- I can't believe that I'm a part of that! ...I don't know why, I just didn't realize there were so many decisions to be made… It's just so much bigger, um, then whatever position that you're in. Because I know what I think must be big, has to be tenfold for Dr. Richards, twenty-fold for Dr. Eisley. Um, as a teacher, I definitely didn't realize it. As a building principal: no. Not realizing all the many components, and the priorities, the big picture… In some of those cases, in some things I know there are things that I definitely need to explain to principals that this is a much bigger issue than just what you're looking at, I do. Um, a lot of those big things come with personnel, hiring, positions…

Heidi: Once again, [all of cabinet] is focused on the same. And if you are going to…the expectation is that that focus still stays on the same. So I'm thinking, you know, if it were a dysfunctional team and we weren't all focused on the same, we [would] go to cabinet and we [would] act like we're doing things, and we [would] act like we're having discussion, and we [would] act like we agree on something and then [when] we leave, and we aren't…and we [would be] doing our own separate thing: [that's] not going to work. And so and it is working… But that's the Greenfield Way. And I mean, we're, and I really feel like at school sites, they see that, that we're all—we're all connected. I'll walk into other buildings, and…I know who the teachers are and we'll have a conversation. And it's the same with Dr. Eisley and Dr. Richards. It's easier to

recognize them because they're the superintendent and the associate superintendent.

E: Um, is it replicable? Do you think that what happens at Greenfield can happen at other places?

Heidi: I've thought about that…And I do. I do think it's replicable. But, it's going to have to start with that core. It's going to and then from that core, it doesn't matter how big…Because we're constantly communicating and on the same page. And the teachers don't feel so far away from us. We are so close. We are SO close! When I can have a teacher catch me at the Teacher of the Year ceremony and say, "I have an idea about kindergarten and first grade assessments…I'd like to meet with you." This is a TEACHER. Yes. Let's set up a time after spring break. And I would never do that without the involvement of the building level principal… That's my job… I mean we are working really, really, really hard [at GPS]. We know that, and we're doing it with fewer people, but we're closer to the ground!

Research Question 5: How do those perceptions of internal context affect district leader beliefs about the ability to change?

Overall, the district leaders expressed the composition and structure of the internal context in a positive light. They view the internal context as a source of strength in their continual battle with the challenges of the external context. The district leaders spoke candidly about the moments when they realized that because the composition of the district was changing it would force them to re-imagine what public

education actually is and does. In their discussion of these changes spurred by the internal context, they spoke with fervor. The district leaders perceived the changes forced by the internal context as progress and growth, as a broadening of the purpose of public education. They take pride in their determination to serve all students, and the internal changes forced the district to improve, which makes them a stronger organization.

In the following quote, Dr. Richards talks about how the change in demographics at Greenfield forced the district to re-think public education. She explains that more than ten years ago when the demographics were starting to shift, she had a disagreement with the previous superintendent, Dr. Hollis, about whether Greenfield should have a common curriculum or stick with site-based management. Dr. Richards argued that the principal at Lewis Elementary, which at the time was the only school serving high-poverty students, was not able to meet the needs of those students; whereas the principal at a high-income school in the district had a surplus of resources for students who already had resources. In the end, the demographics over the whole district shifted to mirror the diversity of Lewis, and Dr. Richards' belief that the common curriculum would provide equity became relevant for the entire district:

> *Dr. Richards: So Dr. Hollis and I got into a really bad fight over [it.] [I said,] "Ok! We need a common curriculum." She said, "No, I'm a site-based management person. The principals know what's best for their kids." And I said, "But, no. This is an equity issue. Because you have people who are giving a very fact-based rote memorization approach at Lewis, and you've got folks over at Washington Elementary building a rainforest inside the classrooms."...*

And so, in comes neighborhood schools. And then we start meeting with teachers there, and we say, "What do you need? What's the problem?" And they say, "The kids don't have electricity. Heating. They don't have…they're missing large amounts of school. They don't have..." And then we had to say, "Well, what are the real problems? Because we thought we knew and we didn't." So in comes the clinic, in comes behavioral health support, in comes after-school programming. Now we're working as a full blown- community school…So what did that tell us? So the Greenfield I walked into sixteen years ago was "We teach it, it's your responsibility to learn it. All these other people clearly got it." And then we started saying "no." Our responsibility is-- and then we started holding ourselves accountable. Our responsibility is to do whatever we can to leverage resources to support every child and remove every barrier. Is that the role of school? Who cares?

Because they think about education differently, Greenfield leaders explain that they want to recruit, develop, and retain innovative, passionate thinkers:

Dr. Richards: [In the] whole interview process with the teacher, [we are] making sure we're very crisp in the explanation of why a community school is so different than a regular school assignment. Twila [the principal at one of the community schools] talks about it in terms of trying to talk people out of the job. She says… "I have learned that I really only want people to come into this with eyes wide open, … Because if everything we do for the whole child comes from school, the community school serves as the hub for the community, parents look

to school for more than just academics, then they…it's ALL about the relationship. Every time. So, teaching, making sure that teachers know, you may be a great teacher and this may be something that you want to come back to at a different stage in your life, but the expectations for you are going to go above and beyond what you might experience if you went to XYZ public school across town, because those kids have a lot fewer challenges, and this district may or may not have that level of expectation for what school should be and what school should provide. So she talks about it to other new principals and existing principals as, almost as issuing a challenge in a way. She always has such a positive way of making people keenly aware of what those expectations are going to be, so that there's no surprise in there for either party.

In this quote, Dr. Richards explains that teachers at Greenfield are motivated by a mission to serve:

Dr. Richards: So… that's an internal barrier to try to keep the best talent dealing with these day-to-day pressures that are real. And keep the very best talent …engaged and supported and appreciated…

E: So how are you? What are you doing to keep people?

Dr. Richards: I think that goes back to the "why." We, these people, are mission-driven. They have to know the effort that they're giving every day pays off. You know there's a bigger, there's something bigger they're serving. It's not about me getting these 30 kids to pass the algebra [test]. It's understanding this goal of 100% graduation. It's understanding that you're not just changing

this child's life, but this child's child's life and everything beyond that for your $34,000 a year…I don't think we'd keep the teachers we have if they weren't working for a higher purpose. It's not Dr. Eisley. It's definitely not me. They are working for the value.

Dr. Richards and Dr. Eisley both recounted a specific instance that indicated the paradigm shift at Greenfield. Dr. Richards details three moments that stuck out in her mind as watershed moments that signaled that change at Greenfield was inevitable. The first turning point was the opening of a community school. The memorable moment occurred when district leadership began holding everyone accountable for the individual student—as evidenced in the exchange concerning the story of every dropout in the district. The third watershed moment was the unveiling of the Strategic Plan:

Dr. Richards: For me, personally, when we opened the clinic at Lewis Elementary. And we said to the community that we're taking on larger issues in meeting the needs of the whole child rather than just focusing on academics. In order TO focus on academics, we have-we have-realizing that there is power of the partnership…That was a watershed moment, because from that collaborative with the State University came Family and Children's Services, the YMCA, and on, and on, and on, and on. So that, because they were so well-respected, I think that if we had gone down the street to a small little clinic, one doctor whose name wasn't known…you wouldn't have seen the same response. There was this sense, all of a sudden; it triggered a corporate and community responsibility. A sense of, "I'm supposed to be partnering in this way." And the

school district…You know how people like to say that schools have never changed, the school setting, education as an entity has never changed in 100 years. And I like to bash that as a, you know, as a either a university or a business or a citizen…here are people reaching out in very innovative ways…And thinking about things differently. Now it's my responsibility to meet that challenge or meet that expectation. So that-that created a whole new way of working together with the community. That was number one. Number two, when we came out with this goal of 100% Graduation College and Career Ready, and I don't know, I would almost say, even before that…I would almost say, there was…there were really three… but we had this moment on a snow day…did I tell you about Snow-mageddon?

E: No.

Dr. Richards: So, we work twelve months out of the year, and if there's a snow day, we have to take a vacation day if we're not going to come in on the snow day. So about Day Nine of Snow-mageddon, when we were all completely sick of being in our houses, we had taken all the vacation days we could exhaust. And we were mostly all back at work even though the busses couldn't run. And all the administrators were at their schools, as well…So, we missed like eleven days of school…Right, so…We call everyone together…And one of the things that happened at secondary was that we asked the principals to bring their drop-out report from that quarter. And we had copies of them already, so it was a little bit of a scavenger hunt to see if they knew where those were…

And then they showed up with them in hand, or we had them, and we passed them out. And we asked them to tell the story of every child on this drop-out report. Now. I don't want to sound… We have awesome principals…but they are principals of very large buildings.

E: Yes. And the task you're asking them to do, I mean, this is un-heard of. So.

Dr. Richards: Right. So. I don't…we have very conscientious people, but they were woefully unprepared…So, we started with 6th and 7th grade with the principal. And he said, "I don't know. My registrar can probably tell you." And Dr. Hollis said, "Well, your name is signed on this form. You know, because you've signed it." And there was a really uncomfortable moment, and you saw when people were grabbing their phones and starting to text to try to "phone a friend" or text a friend, because they know they're coming up in this list and they're going to be asked the same question. And they're not going to be any better prepared, maybe even less so, because the list, when you get to the high school is longer…And there was this—I mean we're all eyeball-to-eyeball. There are no kids in the school anywhere. So we have complete and total focus. And it was painful: for all of us. Because, the great thing about this school district is that everybody accepts more personal responsibility than what even seems reasonable. So, there wasn't a person… It was my fault, too. It was everybody's fault. That we don't…that the list was so long…and that we don't know the story. And so, we began talking about this model for personalization that means you HAVE to know their story. It is YOUR JOB to know their story…and to know that we've exhausted every resource known. And, we might

not be able to fix it. But, boy we better be able to know by the time their name goes on this list, we better have thrown EVERY SINGLE thing we have, we've brought every resource to bear for this kid. And that changed. That was a watershed moment. Which led us to designing GCA, led us to think about redesigning secondary, and having our counselors and principals loop with kids. It led us to this big hairy audacious goal of 100% Graduation College and Career Ready. And then it was announcing that goal to grades 9-12 on a professional development day when we had them for four hours. And we said, "We're going to attempt to do something here that may not have ever been accomplished anywhere. And we feel like if anyone can do it: we can. We have incredible people at every level of this organization and it's going to take every single one of them re-thinking their job. The attendance clerks have to think differently. The bus drivers have to think differently. We changed our child nutrition program to feed kids differently. (laughs) You know we started running shuttle busses after school and taking high school kids—all our secondary kids—home after second waves of activities ended after the school day, because kids weren't being able to take advantage of after school activities because they didn't have transportation. It-it went horizontally, across the organization.

E: So, what was the atmosphere in the room when that was announced?

Dr. Richards: It was…you could have heard a pin drop… We already knew for three years plus what was going to happen. So we were doing everything we could behind the scenes to set all this up, so that this transition went as smoothly

as possible from every seat that we occupied, and we knew we were pulling strings to make certain things happen and we just couldn't share that. That was a secret. So. Dr. Eisley stands on the stage as the Associate Superintendent and says, "I give you permission to leave. If this is not the army you signed up for. If this is not the right time in your life. We're going to still want to be your friend. We're going to still want to worship with you…" I remember him specifically saying that. "We want to play golf with you. No harm, no foul. But, we're about to try to do something that's not going to be ordinary. And you have permission to leave." And fifty percent of our counselors did. We lost half of the counselors in secondary. Specifically in the intermediary schools, four new counselors in that year. ..And so for me, each one of those things, each one of those moments stand out to me: even to me that was REAL. I mean, it was a different level of real.

E: Yeah.

Dr. Richards: Because the neighborhood schools model had really affected Lewis Elementary and some of the other elementary schools on that end of the district. But it hadn't made that "big splash" where the ripples had disrupted the district. Okay. So if you were in Clover Meadow Elementary [on the wealthy side of the district], the fact [was] that Lewis Elementary really hadn't changed your life. There were still places you could go if you didn't like Lewis, there were places you could go and stay at Greenfield and you could have school like you knew it back then…All of the sudden, now this new expectation

happens at secondary and we say, "This is truly the end of the world as you know it." I mean, I actually hear the REM song in my head…

E: (laughs)

Dr. Richards: (laughs) Because there was no place you were going to go that was going to escape it. And that was the most terrifying and exhilarating moment: ever. I mean. It's-it's just the most…gut wrenching, but yet, liberating to think the-the-we're out of the box. We can't even find the box at this point. Everything that people say, "I can't do this because of x-y-and-z…" Man you want to talk about putting the mirror up and saying, "The solutions are not out the window. The solutions are right here in the mirror. And we're going to have to figure this out because there aren't models for us to look to." So. This is blue sky thinking. This is creativity at its finest. This is brainstorming all the intellectual capacity you have to bear and trying to design a system that brings these goals and ideals to fruition. (laugh).

Dr. Eisley described the very same watershed moment when he unveiled the Strategic Plan as the paradigm shift for Greenfield. This was the point where the leaders were making a concrete statement that education at GPS would be tailored to the needs of the students they serve, which meant that there would be a whole new way of thinking about their work.

Eisley: Yeah. Yeah. Um, you know five years ago I did apply it by way of giving a message to our faculty in a professional development meeting, in the spring, um, five years ago. We launched this idea of transforming ourselves as an

institution that was going to say 100% Graduation College and Career Ready. And I remember some of the um, um, moans and some of the comments that I received in the performing arts center…where the faculty were assembled. And I said to them at that point in time that "There will be some of you…For most of us in this room, it will be an audacious goal that we can eventually believe in and buy into. But there's going to be some of you perhaps some of you have colleagues sitting beside you right now who think there is no way that this can be done. And, that's okay for you to believe like that. But it's not okay for you to believe like that and think that you can continue to stay in our amazing organization. Because if you're not whole-heartedly committed to this, then you, you, you need to consider moving on/elsewhere. And we're still going to like you as a person, like you as a friend. And we'll still be worshipping with you, playing golf with you, being professional, but um, you've got to find your seat in the organization. And if indeed you're trying to find a seat in the organization, but yet you don't believe that this can be done? Well, you know, there's other districts, other places that you should consider." It was tough. You know, that's, that's uh…It's one of those crucial conversations. Sometimes like those you have with your kids where you say it's either understanding how you fit in with this family and wanting to fit in or deciding for yourself that "You know what? My philosophy is not congruent with what this district or what the administration or the board of education wants to do"…I've watched, um, a lot of colleagues not only in teaching, but also in counseling, and even some administrators who felt like this was an, um, insurmountable goal. And, so

because they thought that it was an insurmountable goal that they wanted to, you know, go elsewhere…I don't…They wanted to [go] from the standpoint that they realized that we were going to change their worlds. Such as going away from a class principal to going to what is now a-a-a, I mean a school principal to a class principal. We lost…several people in that regard because…we lost counselors. Ellen, we lost over, about fifty percent of our counseling staff.

E: And, would you say most of those went of their own will?

Eisley: Yes, oh yes, yes, yes…. Instead of looking at it as a way of changing what we are doing for kids, they looked at it as a threat. You know, we said to them, "You know what, you're no longer going to be eating lunch together, you're no longer going to be in the some office area and in this 'counseling center.' You're going to be tied to the hip with an administrator, and you're going to be responsible, along with the administrator for the success or failure of 450 kids."

Research Question 6: What is the ideology espoused by district leaders?

The repeated phrase of "100% Graduation, College and Career Readiness" is not empty lip-service to an overused slogan. The mission statement is the language used to capture the ideology. For these four cabinet members, the mission statement of Greenfield can be realized: it is an action statement. Interestingly, each one of the participants paired his or her repetition of the mission statement with some form of action. These actionable themes emerged during the coding process. Dr. Eisley often spoke of his ideology in conjunction with the action item of the Strategic Plan which he views as a framework for realizing this goal of 100%. Dr. Richards paired ideology

statements with action language about providing students the innovative academic support they need to succeed. Heidi Buesking's actionable term paired with ideology is the Greenfield Way: the sense of pride in the culture of who and what Greenfield is. Finally, Linda Burton spoke about the ideology most frequently with language concerning strong and effective communication: which she explained is essentially the foundation of relationship-building.

Drawing from Michael Fullan's writing about the moral imperative of leaders, I asked each participant about their personal value system and how that intersected with their commitment to Greenfield's mission. Each cabinet member shared very personal insights about his or her values and faith. These narratives provide insight into the deep personal commitment each of these four leaders feel toward their work at Greenfield.

Heidi Buesking shared her faith journey and explained that she is committed to providing a loving and caring learning environment for all children. She explained that this country depends on having an educated electorate. In another interview segment, Heidi explained that she wants these children to thrive in an environment in which they can take pride. Her desire to create a culture that is safe, that students enjoy and take pride in (this is the Greenfield Way) is a result of having had an experience in which she greatly benefited from the safe loving environment teachers and classmates provided her during a difficult time in her childhood:

> *Heidi: The Greenfield Way is personalization. It is about individual students, not a group of students. Not: this is what we do in fourth grade. This is what we do in fourth grade for YOUR child. Um…the Greenfield Way is how you*

treat people. The Greenfield Way is…and when I say "how you treat people" you know: respectful.

E: Yes.

Heidi: A courteous way.

E: Right.

Heidi: Um. The Greenfield Way is first class. You know if we say, "We need to do this the Greenfield Way" WE KNOW…it…it HAS to be GOOD. Um. Or, if we say…uh…We hear it all the time, "The Greenfield Way" now.

E: Mm-hmm.

Heidi: And it's just part of our culture…and the reason I'm in education is because of how important education actually is. And so. We have a great country. Our country, I believe, solely relies on the education of our children. They're…those are our next leaders!

E: Yeah. Yes. [laughs] Well. It speaks volumes. So. Do you have a faith based belief system that feeds into why you feel like this work is important?

Heidi: Yes... Um. I have my purpose here on earth. I'm a Christian…And, I know this is what I'm supposed to be doing. And I don't um…I'll have to tell you…I have a REALLY interesting (laughs) story. I. I was raised Jewish.

E: Were you?

Heidi: Yes. And so in Midwestern City Public Schools, not a…we don't have a huge Jewish community here in Midwestern City. And…there were just a couple of other Jewish kids in my school. So, not very many, um Jewish friends within my own school… My mom was very sick when I was in junior high and high

school and died right when I was in my senior year...And so, I really, really questioned my faith. And I had some close friends in my school that were Christians and really, in not a pressuring way or anything…invited me to do some things with them. And so I just started exploring, I started questioning. And it led me down the path to become a Christian… So, part of my feeling with being an educator and being a teacher [is about] understanding how important my friends in my public school and teachers [were to me], that I'm sure were Christians, without proselytizing, I look back now and see…I can think about some of the notes teachers would send me…you know, when my mom will ill. When she died. You know, just sharing of their love…Which is coming from their faith. And, how important that was. It made me realize that your role as a public school teacher is a role that I really thought Christ would want me to have… Because I know I can't…you know…first amendment. I understand that.

E: Sure.

Heidi: But I thought I could share my love through being a teacher to kids and someday maybe they would have the same experience I had. If that makes sense.

E: Yes. (very touched)

Heidi: (Laughs) So, like I said, I have an unusual story.

Dr. Richards explains that her life could have taken a very different trajectory had she not be adopted by the parents who raised her. She grew up in poverty, and she has the desire to "pay it forward." Dr. Richards views her work as ways to ensure that the opportunities she was given are not left up to chance for the students at Greenfield.

In this excerpt, Dr. Richards explains how her background motivates her to make sure that students at Greenfield have every support and every opportunity for involvement.

> *Dr. Richards: We share a common background of growing up in poverty. I, I had, I was adopted as a baby… I grew up in a very small town. My dad has a GED, my mom worked as a secretary, well she worked at a convenience store, well she was a night convenience clerk, and then she was a grocery store clerk. And then she worked as a book-keeper. So, my parents wanted the very best for me and they did…I couldn't have asked for a better up-bringing as far as people who wanted, who tried to support me with everything they had. That wasn't a lot monetarily, but a lot of social capital, at the table… Thankfully, I get a scholarship from the national science foundation to be a middle school math and science teacher. And the banker who (laughs) helped my parents adopt me…my parents had to borrow money from the bank to adopt me…his daughter was an associate dean at The Other State University…she helped me figure out college. ..And she was kind of my…well, she didn't do that much for me once I got there, but knowing she was there, and that I could go get help…*
>
> *E: A gate-keeper*
>
> *Dr. Richards: (nods)… was amazing. And so…that's why [I] believe so much in neighborhood schools. That's why we believe so much in personalization. That's why we believe that every child has to have the advocate that [I] lucked into through serendipitously things that went my way, totally by grace and chance, I got some opportunities. And so [I'm] very committed to putting those*

pieces in place systematically. So you don't rely on chance for that to happen for kids. .. And, I have other things that drive me… like STEM and neighborhood schools. And the KidsFirst Initiative is important to me. Um, early childhood (laughs), because I was a head-start kid. You know? …So, those are things that I just think if I have been able to provide…I look at all the resources my daughter has, and if I have been able to do that in one generation. One group of children, if caring adults have caused me to change that trajectory with my child, then her child, everybody thereafter. You know, this is where we have to put our effort…This is about…public school…is why I get up in the morning, every day. We are providing…we are serving…everyone. My goal is to provide the best education for 16,000 kids because my kid is one of them! My one and only kid gets the same reading curriculum that everyone else gets. She gets the same math instruction that everyone else gets. I'm designing for my kid 16,000 times. I want the counselor to know who every single one of those kids is. I want them to feel loved at school. I can't change their home life, but I can change their seven hours a day. And I can give them a place to come over the summer. "I" meaning corporate Greenfield, not Laura Richards…As a public school advocate. That's what I can do. And, and, so…that's pretty darn motivating. It's big. …

E: So, um, are you…(clears throat)…So, do you have a faith-based belief system?

Dr. Richards: (Perks up, smiles, matter-of-fact) I do.

E: And does that cross paths with your sense of purpose at work?

Dr. Richards: Yes. I-I have a strong sense of needing to serve. I have a strong sense of paying back, and paying forward everything that's been given to me. And I feel incredibly blessed---is the only word that I can think of. It's a true blessing. I feel like I was given an incredible amount of grace. And my life, in general could have been something very different had I not been adopted by the parents that raised me. Had I not had the community around me. Had I not had the family and support and just…all of those things that round out a human being and give you confidence to try things…I wouldn't—I wouldn't be where I am today. I try to remain very grateful and gracious about that gift, and I feel like it's my responsibility on this earth to do everything I can to help create a system that doesn't leave that to chance for kids… I still go back and think about how I applied for this job like out of the Midwestern City Paper…And—I know—but that seems so crazy to me. That I believe it has been the best spent…I believe every place I've ever worked, I've learned something. Even from times that it didn't go as I thought it would. But I've learned something, and this is an environment, that no matter what my future holds, no matter what position I see myself wanting to pursue, there are things about this culture that I remind myself daily I can never take for granted here. And it will take…I will have to have patience, if I'm ever anywhere else, I'll walk in expecting something that was very, very special…here. And I just have had the ability to grow up in it.

Linda, the communications director, speaks about her value system as a personal philosophy that feeds into her work. She explains that she left the field of journalism because she was tired of covering stories about other people making a difference in the world. She wanted to work that fulfilled her desire to make a difference, and she had been an education reporter, so she was familiar with the importance of public education work. Linda's philosophy, "Together, we make a difference" actually became the motto of GPS. When I first went into the field, I more or less scoffed at it because it sounds so cliché. After spending a great deal of time at GPS, I learned that this motto not an empty cliché; in fact, it stems from the deep set value system of the Director of Communications. Linda explains this in the following excerpt:

> *Linda: Ah, what role does communication play in running an urban district? I would say, it's an active, supportive role. And individually, I have the motto, I've adopted the motto, it's always been my philosophy as well, but that's a perfect way of saying it, "Together we make a difference."*
>
> *E: Mmm.*
>
> *Linda: "Together we make a difference." And that's why I came. It's so gratifying to me, I moved from media into wanting a job where instead of reporting on everybody else doing good things, or making a difference. Because those were the stories I was always attracted to. I, in my mid to late thirties, wanted to be a part of an organization that made a difference. And when I saw, because I had covered education and knew how multi-faceted it was and knew how important it was for (emphasis added) our democracy, I- I jumped at the*

opportunity I saw at the Midwestern City Paper ad for a communications director in Greenfield Public Schools…I got this job, and because after I was here, I loved it so much, I went on and got a master's in education: the foundations of education. The history, philosophy, and sociology of education…Which I think informs my practice a great deal. So if you were to ask me what does it take to develop a successful urban public school district, [I believe it takes:] a clear mission, a plan that involves key publics—the people that you're serving, implementation, constant evaluation and tweaking… It's a process. Life is a process. It's dynamic and you have to be able to meet the challenges… I have to tell you it helps me get up in the morning when I think there's so much baloney being thrown at schools and thinking that and painting all schools with the same brush, which I think is a dirty brush to start with, with any school. But I truly do think that public schools are so important for our democracy. For maintaining our democracy. Educating our electorate.

E: Um, let me ask you one more question. Do you have a faith-based belief system?

Linda: I was raised Catholic, I went to private schools even SLU…And uh so my faith training or my upbringing was Catholicism. Right now, I do not practice Catholicism or organized religion. I would say I have a spiritual-- a strong spiritual belief… But it's not necessarily a um, person-type God. I don't know how to put my arms around. I'm still exploring, but I see-the extremes and even the-- I see how religion-- organized religion-- can be a closing-elitist um, practice. And it just doesn't do a lot for me

E: Well I ask because I wondered if that if-if-if-if that fed into also why you think that this work is so important.

Linda: I wouldn't say it's my, it I think it's what a lot of what I believe is in I have faith in goodness, and love, and uh I champion humanity. And the pursuit of prosperity and health…And that feeds into it personally…And I think that my philosophy of "together we all make a difference for each other" or "it takes a village," you can say it any way you want to, but I do believe [it]… And you know, I was raised in a middle class, probably lower-middle class, and didn't realize it because my parents never acted like we were any less than or we could do any less than, and I know that a lot of kids don't have that. I know a lot of people don't have that strength and I think they find it in themselves if given the opportunity to do the best that they can, and to be shown some opportunities or options. So that informs my…that's why I wanted to do something in an organization that was dedicated to do that…My core values drive my… my passion and I don't ever--I've never you know when people ask you, "What's your passion?" I don't know. And you say…I don't want to say: work. I don't want to sound like a workaholic (laughs). But it's not black and white, you can find passion in one day that's (laughs) different than the next. I'm in yoga now I understand living and appreciating each moment …And I've also had a serious accident, so I understand and appreciate; and I'm older, and so I understand and appreciate. I think I am a…I was very passionate in the very beginning though. I must tell you this was my favorite job. I thought I had found my niche.

And I've been through some bad times…we all do. But I still can say that. And I think that's success!

Dr. Eisley is the central proponent of the ideology of the district. His work is to spread the ideology AND ensure that it is paired with action so that the perception of external barriers doesn't become whining and empty complaining, and so that the mission statement of 100% Graduation, College and Career Ready doesn't become an empty boilerplate message. Dr. Eisley has to move these words toward the action of improving the process of public education at Greenfield. The actionable theme that Dr. Eisley discusses in conjunction with the ideology is the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan is a framework for making decisions that move the district toward its mission.

When asked about his value system, Dr. Eisley talked about the essentiality of public education for a thriving democracy. He also talked about the role of leadership in an organization as a means of living out his values. He views his role as a servant to the organization and its mission. This sense of service leadership coincides with his personal religious beliefs. He added that his faith is based on an element of hope, as is his work. See the following interview excerpt below:

Dr. Eisley: How do we arrive-- first of all-- at our core? Um, and once we have it, what are our core values as an organization that we will uphold? Um, and then what's going to be our Strategic Plan? You know, what are, what are our objectives, strategies in order to meet this audacious goal we often talk about of 100% graduation? That in itself, arriving at that is interesting because people have said, you know, "How, how do you all arrive at that?" And that's an

interesting story because if it's not 100% then what is it? I think you have to aim incredibly high and to say we're always going to meet that mark each and every year! I don't think that it's possible, maybe within that year…But two or three years out, by continuing to follow our kids and, um, working with them, I think we can ultimately get to it. We've proven that, you know?

E: Yes.

Dr. Eisley: Um, but to do it each and every year is incredibly difficult, and timing is not always right for some kids, because life happens. They have to work, they have kids, they get in trouble, but that doesn't mean that we should give up on them. And that's… I think… unique about [what] Greenfield is: that we have to continue to believe in our kids even though we didn't graduate them in 2015 when they should have, what are we doing for them in the years beyond when they should have graduated? As a society, I think we're missing something here, as a nation. That too often we leave this education up entirely to the student, and you know, think about their supports as a person after they get through their senior year, who then is there to help advocate for them? And help them through this roadmap, if you will, of life?

…

Eisley: It's knowing when you are in the life-changing business. Um, not only in terms of our students, but with our, hopefully, with our adults, too. And providing them with a very worthwhile working environment, um and of course with our students, we know if we provide them with an amazing learning

experience, then they are-are going to graduate and flourish and change their lot in life. That's what motivates me. It's like what Horace Mann once said, "Education beyond all other devices of human origin, is the greatest equalizer known to the conditions of mankind." That's, that's powerful. And I don't think we think about that too often. We don't think about it because we kind of take it for granted. And I think that maybe the longer we live, and the longer we work, after you've procured degrees and have things, you maybe forget about where you came from. And sometimes it's good to just stop and pause and think, "Wait a second." You know, I wouldn't have at all what I have today unless it had been for, you know, education's power and how it's uh, changed the course our lives. And look at what it can do for our kids, but…But really when you think about the importance of public education for our kids, it's also believing in something bigger than yourself. It's understanding the critical-ness of it to our democracy. And it's you know…Jefferson talked about that. Public schools are really the lifeblood of our democracy. So. So, when I think about doing this work, Ellen, it's really about, yes—making a difference in people's lives and hoping they'll take advantage of every opportunity that we provide for them—but it's also, the biggest calling (laughs) perhaps is knowing the investment that we're making in our country and in our own future.

E: Well, it's not in the US Constitution…

Eisley: No. It's not. And nowhere in those 8,000 words does it mention public education. But, it does talk about, you know, citizenship, and the importance of us having the Bill of Rights, the pursuit of life, the pursuit of happiness, the

pursuit of freedoms. And we know how one acquires those freedoms, and obviously, that's through an educated body. Um. Think about that. You know, in the absence of an educated body, you have a lot (laughs) of crazy … You have that.

E: [laughs] Yeah.

Eisley: You have those ideas, those ideals, and ideas that are presented. And what's going to happen is that calm minds will prevail, right? And educated minds will prevail. And people will finally say, "You know what, this is not…um…appropriate. This is not right." Again. Education to our country…we would not be where we're at, today, if we did not have a quality education system. A quality PUBLIC education system…Nothing against private or parochial schools. They have their own purpose, but…When you talk about what has the biggest effect on our country? Think about the public schools, you know, and their impact…on the quality of life that we all desire to have, not just for ourselves, but also for our kids and really, for everyone.

E: And when you say, "everyone," you mean…everyone.

Eisley: Everyone. It's the beauty of America. We have economic, you know, we don't only live in a democracy in terms of having a public, representative form of democracy, but we have economic democracy. No one has to stay in the lot you were born with. As I like to say a lot of times, you know we should be telling our kids, "Don't let your income affect your outcome."

…

E: So how does that cross with your personal…do you have personal religious beliefs?

Eisley: (Very serious.) Yes…. Faith based individual: absolutely. Uh, a great deal. I am a believer, but I do not wear my belief or my religion, if you will, on my sleeve…Um, I think there is obviously a… a… theological base that makes up my leadership. But I think if you looked up that theological base and looked at the professional base of that, I think that those two probably are very similar. Um. [Long pause.] You can probably draw a lot of parallels between those things such as you know, from a theological sense, it talks about, you know, being someone of character and treating someone with respect. You know…People and all students with dignity…The same thing is true at a professional level. You know, if you're going to be a great leader, make sure your people know that you are committed to them and you believe in them. And you trust them. And after all, we know that to trust, to have trust you have to be vulnerable. I am vulnerable from the standpoint of I have to um, I have to believe and I have to trust people when they want to say, when they want to take on a new project. I'll ask the tough questions and that is, "How is it going to help our kids? First and foremost. And if it's not, then why are we doing it?" …So um, a lot of parallels, I think between someone who has um, you know, a belief structure and there's a lot of things we do based on hope. And from a theological sense, there's a lot of things we do based on faith, right? … Things that you can't necessarily see, but that you hope are going to be there when you are through. Um, and that's true in leadership as well.

E: So does that belief structure also feed into what you talked about earlier as far as your moral imperative with public education and it being a right and everyone…

Eisley: Yeah. Wow. That's a good question. Um. (Long pause) Yes, Yes, boy. I firmly believe that we're all enjoying the freedoms and the liberties that we have today because someone gave of themselves for that… So, in terms of a moral imperative…I love that. I love that word.

E: (Pleased) Fullan. Michael Fullan.

Eisley: It is. It is. I love the fact that Fullan, and yes, you're now causing me to reflect back on his writings. But, you know that drives a lot of what I think about. And I know that we are we are to be…To me, the greatest leader that there can be is someone who is servant-minded; who is a servant leader. And realize that what I am doing today is simply paying back what someone did for me…prior. And what I'm doing today will be gifting then for future leaders. And for future students.

Research Question 7: How do the beliefs of internal and external context shape district leader ideology?

As previously established in findings above, the district leaders perceive the external context as full of challenges and barriers; they feel like public schools have been shamed and discarded. The district leaders expressed, however, that a healthy public education is needed now more than ever before as the needs of society have changed; as the gap grows between the "haves" and "have-nots." The district leaders

view their mission of 100% of students as the antidote to this gap. They view public education as a right for all students and therefore an important element of American democracy.

As demonstrated in the findings above, district leaders perceive the internal context as their strength; the organizational structure and culture helps Greenfield to push back against the mass disregard of public education. They are committed to the Strategic Plan as the framework to keep focused on the mission. District leaders leverage the Greenfield Way and sense of pride to garner support. The glue that holds it all together is constant, strong, effective communication which is really viewed as the foundation of strong, positive relationship building. Greenfield has strong relationships, the entire organization works because of the sharing of this mission.

Research Question 8: How do district leaders perceive change in the district?

Throughout all the observations, the second highest recurring theme was that of "innovation," it was second only to the discussion of state politics. Innovation was the code assigned to discussion about anything dealing with a new understanding of how to best meet the needs of children. The development of this new understanding concerned innovative initiatives like STEM and KidsFirst; rethinking the role and use of technology in the classroom; changing the structure of the high school so that counselors and principals looped with classes—providing more individualized support; neighborhood schools which connects families to school in many ways including the provision of medical support and social capital; early childhood education—starting

with three year olds and thinking about what it means to "educate" a toddler; and rethinking how to provide relevant opportunities for students who would rather start a career than go to college.

This idea of "innovation" embodies the desired outcome of Greenfield leaders. They want to supersede compliance with regular policies. They want to surpass just making sure that all students graduate. Greenfield leaders want to go beyond meeting the general needs of a "needy population." The desired outcome of Greenfield is to go through a process of change that is "out of the box." To really re-imagine "school," but to do it in a way that still serves the needs of every child. The following excerpts illustrate some of the discussion that centered around this theme of "innovation."

In this excerpt, Heidi talks about the reputation Greenfield has for being an "innovative" district. She talks about the STEM initiative as the flagship program of this innovativeness.

> *Heidi: It's interesting because I still interview a lot of teacher candidates even in my position here. And I'll ask people, "Why Greenfield?" "Well, they're on the cutting edge." "Well, what does that mean to you?" "Well, they're not just doing the standard." "Okay, but what's the standard?" "Well…you don't just tell me that this is what I'm supposed to do, you're interested in my ideas." … And so, teachers do feel like we're interested in their ideas. Especially as we look at what we've done with STEM over the past two years. And STEM not being a classroom, or STEM not being a special school that select students get to go to. It's our belief and philosophy on solving problems. So, yes we are*

innovative. Especially as we structure out the Career Connect and what options student have as they matriculate through our system.

Dr. Richards explains in this excerpt how Greenfield decided to start providing equal opportunities and supports for students who would rather enter the workforce than head to college after they graduate. She talks about the work that goes into creating internship opportunities for kids:

Dr. Richards: Well. The first thing we did, we read about it. And we were looking for more relevance on the career side. Not all kids want the college aspect of our goal of 100% graduation = College and Career ready. They're sick of being in a seat. They don't want to be in school… And so I just say we want to pull those options up to equal level of esteem. And make kids feel really great about picking a career. So they can go straight to work, incur no college debt and start making it happen right now. Why would we, why would we make it seem like that was less of a choice?

E: Yes.

Dr. Richards: So in that same vein we have a way for them to earn seventy hours of college credits, so what opportunities are we putting out there on a platter for them for a career? So, at Greenfield we call it the Career and Connect program…And this is our beginning year, and what it provides are internships in the community for student to try out and find a passion and ideally gain some certification while they're in high school to make them marketable for high demand high salary professions. So, uh, it's cool. So we're focusing right

now on engineering, manufacturing, um teaching—which I can't say is going to be high salary, but it is going to be high demand, we're in the process of creating, well we're in a little program right now… If it's in the core of priorities, we've already made the decision to make the commitment to kids. We can't say 100% Graduation and College and Career Readiness, and have nothing on the career side.

Dr. Eisley explains how the STEM initiative is different at Greenfield, how it is more than a buzz word. STEM is actually the embodiment of the kind of innovation Greenfield is striving to achieve:

E: So when I hear people in this district say "Well, we're doing STEM," it's something different than what some of the neighboring districts are doing…Can you articulate what I'm trying to say?

Dr. Eisley: Mmm-hmm. Yes. Well, like neighborhood schools. We don't approach STEM as just a program. STEM is really a philosophy. Okay? STEM should not just focus on… again you know… or just be isolated to your science classes. The whole idea of science, technology, engineering, and math is really about inquiry. It's about extending that practice in English, physical education, and obviously science, math and social studies. It's a new way of thinking about things. It's allowing students-- I, I frame it this way: It's allowing students to become authors of their own knowledge…You just simply don't deliver in a didactic manner to where you tell a teacher, okay, you just deliver information and say "Ok, here's how you do this." It's allowing

students to practice certain objectives in order to ascertain a deeper understanding, a deeper level of knowledge about a particular objective. That's what the philosophy of STEM… you know when you talk about the STEM initiative, that's what we mean. We don't want to create just a center for STEM, or just a program called STEM, or a class, or a building. STEM—the initiative and the philosophy—needs to be imbued throughout all our environment. That's what's happening in learning. We're finding that kids want an experience where they're developing an understanding for themselves as opposed to just simply listening from a teacher and digesting or regurgitating back on a test. The level of understanding is going to be more withstanding or longstanding when you've experienced, um, learning the knowledge for yourself as opposed to just simply hearing it from a teacher. I've always thought this to be true. I don't know who said it, but "The way to a person's mind is through the hands"… More project-based learning experience. And obviously, I think the more we can flip the classroom, the more, the better I think our kids will be.

Summary of Presentation of Findings

RQ1: How do district leaders perceive the external context? Overall: The district leaders perceive the external context as volatile and hostile toward public schools. Examples of this hostility include:

A. Lack of public funding granted to schools

B. Public schools are being threatened by the school choice movement

C. State has a long history of providing insufficient support

RQ2: How do district leader perceptions of the external context affect their beliefs about the district's ability to go through a process of change? Overall: While the leaders perceive the hostility as a significant challenge, they are determined that it will not stop them from achieving large-scale, long-term meaningful change. Examples of this determination include:

A. They stay focused by using the framework of the Strategic Plan.

B. They express the need and willingness to transform to the needs of society, which includes being able to work around many barriers not just the political climate.

C. They establish creative ways to work around the challenging context.

RQ3: How do leaders communicate their beliefs about the external context's effects on the process of change? Overall: The thread of language that begins in cabinet is sewn throughout district communications with all role groups. This language is centered on the notion that the district will stay focused on its mission of 100% Graduation, College and Career Readiness, despite the hurdles placed around them from the external political environment. The leaders then spread the message to principals, teachers, the school board, parents, and the media. It is through this consistent message that viewpoints are exchanged and eventually shared.

A. To each other in cabinet: The message is one of perseverance laced with anger. Dr. Eisley begins each cabinet meeting with relevant Education Policy news.

B. To principals/teachers: In formal meetings and in informal instances, it seems that the message of perseverance always makes its way into the conversation. Usually there is less anger and more sense of "we can."

C. To the school board: a specific forum has been created for school board members to better understand the work of the district: subcommittee meetings. Again, it's the same message of perseverance in spite of the barriers, but to the board the spin is "We know how to make it happen here."

D. To parents: the first line of communication comes from teachers, which is why it's so important that the same messages are consistent. District leaders also have opportunity to directly communicate to parents formally through PTAs and PLAGs—same message: "The political environment seems to be working against us, but we will push back with Greenfield Excellence."

E. To the media: As an external audience, the media provide different challenges; the district leaders perceive the media as pursuing "gotcha" moments. Nonetheless, the district leaders work to build good relationships with reporters and they spin a consistent positive message of perseverance.

RQ4: How do district leaders perceive the internal context? Overall: District leaders have a positive view of the internal context. What do district leaders perceive as the strengths of the internal context?

A. Greenfield student body has transformed (while the transformation poses challenges, as it has moved from being a district of affluent white students, now it's a diverse mix of economic and racial diversity: it's what makes public schools essential to a healthy democracy).

B. GPS has lots of Greenfield Pride.

C. GPS works to recruit and maintain quality personnel.

D. GPS cabinet is a tight-knit family with healthy disputes. Additionally, the GPS organizational structure is flat, which allows the district leaders in the central office to better serve the district at large.

RQ5: How do district leader perceptions about the internal context affect the district leader beliefs about the ability to change? Overall: District leaders expressed their belief that the composition and organizational structure of the internal context is a source of strength in their perseverance against the barriers of the external political environment.

A. As the district demographics have changed, district leaders were forced to take a critical look at what they were doing and how they could improve.

B. Greenfield leaders want to recruit and retain excellent teachers and staff who are motivated by a mission to serve all students.

C. Each district leader shared a specific moment in which they felt the paradigm shift at Greenfield, and they all shared this in a positive way demonstrating that they are driven by a moral imperative.

RQ6: What is the ideology espoused by district leaders? Overall: The words "100% Graduation, College and Career ready" are not empty rhetoric. Each district leader interviewed expressed that this mission is taken literally: they really mean that they will work to ensure that EVERY child at Greenfield graduates ready to take the next steps in life.

A. Every district leader shared a vignette about his/her personal value system or religious beliefs and how it tied into the work.

B. Every district leader had a different emphasis on what action to take to ensure this mission (Dr. Eisley: Strategic Plan; Richards: Innovative initiatives; Buesking: Greenfield Way; Burton: Effective channels of communication).

RQ7: How do the beliefs of internal and external context shape district leader ideology? Overall: The district leaders view their mission as the antidote to the gap between societal "haves and have-nots." They view the mission statement as embodying their belief that public education is a right for all students, and therefore an

important element of American democracy. Additionally, they perceive the internal context as their strength; the organizational structure and culture helps Greenfield to pushback against the mass disregard of public education.

RQ8: How do district leaders perceive change in the district? Overall: The desired outcome of Greenfield is to go through a large-scale, long-term continually improving process of change that is innovative. This idea of "innovation" embodies the desired outcome of Greenfield leaders. They want to supersede compliance with regular state policies. They want to surpass ensuring that all students graduate. Greenfield leaders want to go beyond meeting the general needs of a "needy population."

Chapter VI: Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

Introduction

"We have something really special here." This sentiment was often expressed by Greenfield district leaders. I, too, found that there is indeed something special about Greenfield. In an attempt to define that special quality, I asked the interview participants if the Greenfield case is replicable. Their responses were as elusive as the "special" quality itself. There are many factors that play into Greenfield's unique case and in this chapter I attempt to tease out these qualities that make Greenfield special.

If the findings are the information yielded by the data in response to the research questions, then my analysis and interpretation of the findings is an attempt to use the findings to generate knowledge concerning the original research problem and statement of purpose. Qualitative research unearths the complications of a case. Rather than seeking to isolate variables, as the research instrument, I embrace the complexity of the personalities, the process, and the context that I encountered in my fieldwork. These conclusions are a combination of my understanding of the case, the conceptual framework, and the extensive body of literature that informs this study.

Analysis

Greenfield is not the main public school district in Midwestern City: it is a much smaller district that has benefitted from the development of the city's retail epicenter within its boundaries. A smaller student body paired with the bonding capacity enhanced by the retail zone creates a unique financial situation. Despite the perceived lack of state funding, GPS has managed to continue its progress with state of the art

facilities and technology through the strategic use of the fruits of its successful bond campaigns. Greenfield leaders are quick to recognize the advantage of the district's bonding capacity, and they spend a great deal of time and effort campaigning for it, developing strategic ways of using the funds, and allocating the resources according to the mission. While Greenfield laments the lack of state funding, it benefits from this bonding potential which is not available to most districts across the state due to its location in a retail zone. I recall one instance in which Dr. Eisley spoke to cabinet about a conference he attended with other superintendents. At the conference the superintendents shared photographs and videos of their district facilities. Dr. Eisley explained that the Greenfield facilities put the other districts to shame, and that he was both proud and a little embarrassed. After recounting the experience, he reminded cabinet members that Greenfield is truly "blessed" with its bonding capacity and that they must not take it for granted. This access to resources contributes to Greenfield's uniqueness.

Another unique element of Greenfield is its response to the transformation of the Greenfield student body. Years ago, Greenfield was a rural district that sat on the outskirts of Midwestern City. At that time it served a tight-knit, small-town community that Linda Burton described as "lacking sophistication." Then as Midwestern City developed, Greenfield began serving a much wealthier, higher socio-economic status student body. The Greenfield families had expectations for "sophistication" and all around excellence as they could afford to send their students to private schools if GPS did not pass muster. So, GPS developed. It developed a reputation of prowess in athletics and academics that is still well-known across the state. As time passed, some

of the neighborhoods within the GPS boundaries experienced another shift in terms of their racial and economic composition. The higher-poverty, minority-majority population that was once served by only one GPS elementary school eventually became the composition of the district as a whole. Now, GPS has a unique responsibility in serving the needs of two distinct student populations: the high-poverty students and the high income students. Its leaders vowed that Greenfield would become more attentive and supportive of the needs of its changing student population without compromising its reputation for excellence in the process. So, Greenfield strives to keep the same high quality programs on which it has built its name, while also working to serve the needs of a student population that brings a different set of challenges.

The implementation of a plan to meet every student's needs at any level is another element that makes Greenfield unique. When the student body demographics began to change, GPS leaders had to take a very critical look at their approach to education. Was this re-engineering of the district's mission and purpose the result of a visionary leader? The current cabinet members frequently recall the legacy of Dr. Hollis, the superintendent preceding Dr. Eisley. Did she recruit this unique team of like-minded individuals who are working to continue her legacy? Or did they all cultivate and develop this mission in tandem, influenced by their circumstances and each other? District leaders speak about the hiring and the continual development of mission-driven individuals at the principal and teacher-level. Was their cabinet likewise purposefully recruited and developed? This shared mindset is crucial in implementing this mission of 100% Graduation, College and Career Ready.

There is a family-like chemistry among the individuals in cabinet. They work as a cohesive unit, even while they each are responsible for their own respective departments. In my discussion of methods, I spoke about my "move to the table" as the marker of my acceptance as a participant observer. This sense of "the table" permeated my understanding of the way that cabinet worked. The routine Monday morning cabinet meeting conducted around the executive conference room table was reminiscent of family gathering for a meal in the dining room. There was always coffee and some breakfast in the center of the table. District leaders would serve each other, essentially "breaking bread" together as they discussed and frequently debated issues in the interest of their own departments. They laughed and teased each other in between heated discussions about conflicting departmental interests. Two cabinet members' families were struck by tragedy. The other ten members would keep each other informed of the status of the member of concern. Cabinet members behaved like a family, complete with the annoying cousin who talks too much and the nerdy brother who seems to take everything too seriously. At one time or another someone in cabinet would represent the giggly sister, the mother hen, the father figure, the clown, the sweet one, the bossy one, the practical data head, and the occasional ding-bat. It is because of this great sense of belonging and shared mission that these high ranking executives with frequently conflicting interests could have heated debates and then offer up more biscuits and gravy… an event I actually observed! Can that family dynamic be replicated, and does it serve a purpose in moving the district forward? I argue that it produces an environment of trust in which healthy disputes take place. It makes for a cohesive central office that facilitates the flat organizational structure of the district.

In fact, the flat organizational structure of Greenfield adds to its uniqueness. The interviewed participants take pride in being able to address issues first-hand, viewing layers of bureaucracy as a hindrance to both efficiency and the vital rapport that they believe is necessary in developing trusting relationships among the various levels of the organization. Just as district leaders want teachers to know why they do things the way they do—they want support staff personnel to understand the value of their work, as well. The cabinet members desire and expect that everybody at Greenfield pulls their weight and is thoroughly informed about the importance of their role within the larger system. In their view, this pride in work is not just for an individual's self-respect; rather it is a crucial element in ensuring that the organization runs efficiently and effectively. Similarly, the district leaders expect all district employees to be informed about the political system: this feeds into the success of their ideology, which will be discussed in detail below. While respectful for the role of principal as site-leader, the cabinet members, in their respective departments, often directly work with the school sites. These channels of direct interaction between executive cabinet members and support staff personnel, teachers, and students guard against bureaucratic layers that can veil the daily realities of those at ground level. This keeps Dr. Eisley and the rest of the leadership team fervent in their adherence to the mission because they remain closely connected to the ground.

Dr. Eisley, as the district figure-head is not a "talking head," nor is he a dictator. He views his role as that of an equal to the others on cabinet. This could be because not so long ago, he was "their equal." He is more of a facilitator than a manager. He sets the tone both in cabinet meetings and in the district overall, as one based on

collaboration. He does not waver on his principles, and he staunchly advocates the mission of 100% Graduation. He stands on the foundation of the Strategic Plan as a framework that will last far beyond his tenure as superintendent. I would argue that he views the Strategic Plan as more of a leading force for the district than he is…yet he is the designer, mouthpiece, and evaluator of the Strategic Plan's implementation. His understated servant leadership is another unique feature of Greenfield.

The Greenfield Way is a sense of pride that is rooted in the cultivation of excellence. While I was waiting in her office one afternoon, Eileen Packard, Dr. Eisley's administrative assistant, recounted a story that exemplifies this mysterious sense of pride. She explained that a friend of hers is a professional photographer. He lives in Grand Valley and sends his children to Grand Valley Public Schools, which is Greenfield's major rival. Eileen's friend told her that he was asked to lead the official photography shoot of the Greenfield athletic teams. He told her that prior to the shoot, he was eager to confirm his notions of the unfounded swagger and conceit of Greenfield kids. Then at the photo shoot, he was absolutely amazed at the respect, kindness, and team-spirit the Greenfield athletes and coaches exhibited. Eileen told me that her photographer-friend said to her that there really is an unidentifiable characteristic that is Greenfield. In the same sitting, Eileen was counting the donations from Greenfield personnel to the Midwestern City United Way. Every year Greenfield Public Schools wages a massive United Way campaign, and in commemoration of its twentieth year of United Way campaigns, GPS set and exceeded its goal of $200,000. Eileen looked at the figures, one of which was that fourteen staff members who make a teacher's salary actually donated $500 each and she said, "This is the Greenfield Way." I have been a

part of organizations that are happy when everyone donates a dollar, the Greenfield United Way campaign is a testament to the pride that individuals take in working for this organization. This sense of pride and code of honor certainly adds another unique angle to the Greenfield case.

How do these unique features of Greenfield relate to the conceptual framework first posed in this study? Essentially, the Greenfield mission of "100% Graduation, College and Career Ready" exemplifies Andrew Pettigrew's concept of ideology. The ideological content is the linchpin of this study, both in the theory and in the case findings. In theory, it is the ideological content that allows organizational leaders to use language about their beliefs concerning the context to impel the organization as a whole to take certain action toward a process of change.

The following statements apply Pettigrew's (1979) definition of ideology to the Greenfield findings in an effort to expose the means of translation from shared meaning to shared action. Ideology is: 1.) A set of beliefs about the social world and how it operates. 2.) Containing statements about the rightness of certain social arrangements, and 3.) Thereby, delineating what action should be taken in light of those statements. 1.) **A set of beliefs about the social world:** The findings demonstrate that the district leaders at Greenfield believe that the external political environment is volatile and hostile to public education. They frequently conversed about the hostility of the State Superintendent specifically, and the state government in general, toward public schools, decrying the political loyalty to charter schools; they lamented the lack of state aid to public education. Greenfield leaders expressed frustration in the lack of respect for the

teaching profession; they expressed discontent with the public discourse surrounding the "failure" of the education system.

2.) **Containing statements about the rightness of certain social arrangements:** The findings demonstrate that GPS leaders expressed their shared belief that a thriving public education system is essential for the maintenance of a healthy democracy because public schools are committed to serving all children. They expressed their belief that school choice alternatives, on the other hand, are likely to break down the benefits of public schools because the school choice movement is inherently opposed to the equal opportunity for all students. The leaders at Greenfield often commented that they believed the school choice movement enables modern segregation…that it only exacerbates the problems it purports to solve concerning the education of low-income, disadvantaged students. They champion the role of public schools and public educators as a means and a career which realizes the core of democracy.

3.) **Thereby delineating what action should be taken in light of those statements:** The findings demonstrate that Greenfield leaders believe that their internal organizational structure is ripe for response to these external barriers and pressures. They believe they have the elements in place to move the members of the organization from sharing beliefs toward actually participating in a movement. The structures that contribute to this ability to mobilize a movement include: Greenfield's Strategic Plan with its four core components that they use to focus their efforts toward the mission of 100% Graduation, College and Career Ready. Greenfield works to recruit, develop and maintain a high quality teaching staff throughout the district. Greenfield has a culture

of pride, and a flat organizational structure, and an open method of communication across role groups.

I argue that the Greenfield findings point toward three steps to this transformation of words to action: first there is a common language, the common language creates shared meaning, and in turn, shared meaning leads to solidarity of action: or movement. Ideology has the potential to create a movement, and that movement is spurred by language. Greenfield leaders use ideology to shift beliefs about the political context to action toward a sustainable process of meaningful change across the entire district through shared language, shared meaning, and shared action. The success or failure of GPS's mission rests on the ability to move through these three steps of ideology.

Shared language. The common language observed in cabinet remained consistent across each of the four interviewed participants. Additionally, all four participants perceived that the district at large also shared this language. Elements of this language include frequent reference to the following: the GPS mission statement, "100% Graduation, College and Career Ready," "The Greenfield Way," the centrality of public education to a healthy democracy, the perception that public schools are under attack, the notion of a Strategic Plan that guides decision making, and the four core innovative initiatives of STEM, Neighborhood Schools, College and Career Connect, and Early Childhood Education.

Shared meaning. When probed, each of the four interviewed participants also expressed a sense of shared meaning in terms of the common language. They shared similar motives for working in public education—sense of service leadership, desire to

do meaningful work that make a difference in the lives of students and teachers. All four interviewed participants also situated their work and the work of their departments in terms of the Strategic Plan. They frequently referenced elements of this "living document" without prompting. They all expressed a willingness to be responsive to the changing needs of society. They all zealously expressed, in their own way, the necessity of public education for a thriving democracy and the danger of a political climate that is unfriendly to public education. Each of the participants, when probed, spoke about the importance of a sense of shared purpose among those who work at GPS—they were adamant that to make this kind of work effective, it requires the dogged determination of everyone from the custodian, to the teacher, to the principal, to the bus driver, to the coach, to the superintendent. Additionally, all four expressed the belief that the majority of people who work at Greenfield do, in fact, share this dogged determination.

Shared action? It is the transition from shared meaning to shared action that is seemingly the most difficult to achieve. It is easy to imagine an organization in which a common language creates shared meaning, but falls short of shared action. For example, everyone in an organization may know what the mission statement means and believes it; but they are either unable or choose not to directly act upon this. What is it that prevents Greenfield's mission from being cast aside as an oft-cited slogan with little or no effect on behavior? How does Greenfield produce shared action through shared language? What is the shared action produced by the shared language and meaning? During the coding process, the data revealed that each one of the interviewed participants focused particularly on one actionable task or behavior in conjunction with

his or her discussion of the ideology. Interestingly, each of the four had a different actionable area that he or she expressed passion toward.

Dr. Eisley does not view the mission statement "100% Graduation, College and Career Ready" as just a rallying call; it is an expression of his deep-set beliefs about the importance of public education for this country. He believes that he can put his ideology, his moral imperative for this work to action through investing Greenfield into this mission, and carrying it out by adherence to the Strategic Plan.

"The Greenfield Way" is not a kitschy, catch-all phrase referring to school spirit for Heidi Buesking. She views it as a phrase that symbolizes a profound sense of pride in a public school district that strives for excellence in every realm—student support, athletic success, teacher development, academic achievement, and education of the whole child. Instilling a sense of pride in this excellence associated with Greenfield is the means Heidi uses to activate the ideology.

As Executive Director of Communications, Linda Burton embodies expertise in the theory and practice of communication. She perceives effective communication as the key piece of relationship-building; and she views it as a means to systemically create a culture based on the effective exchange of ideas. Linda's personal motto actually became the official district motto, and she views it as symbolic of what actually takes place at Greenfield, "Together, we make a difference." Effective communication as a means to build relationships is the action that impels a common understanding toward a common action.

Dr. Richards views the implementation of innovative initiatives that are in place to meet the needs of students as the action that turns ideology into a reality. Dr.

Richards is very action-oriented, she has little patience for lip-service, and it is the successful implementation of these initiatives that drives her to be concerned with the common language. Dr. Richards presents herself as someone interested in developing a common language ONLY in the interest of moving actors toward action.

These four action areas—the adherence to the Strategic Plan, the cultivation of "The Greenfield Way," the establishment of strong relationships based on effective channels of communication, and the implementation of innovative initiatives—all contribute to the translation of a common language of shared beliefs to the delineation of what action should be taken in light of these shared beliefs. This occurs in part because of a flat organizational structure that allows for the district leaders to be connected to the daily struggles and successes of the classroom, an executive cabinet that has a positive culture and sense of shared responsibility, a Strategic Plan that guides decision-making, a superintendent who is open to the ideas and leadership of others, a financial situation that allows for the allocation of resources to the innovative initiatives, and a commitment to meeting the needs of all students at GPS.

There are two other points that bear consideration, both of which are rooted in concepts briefly covered in the literature review. The first is the concept coined by Honig and Hatch (2004) as "crafting policy coherence." The authors argue that the convergence of multiple demands upon schools and school systems is simply a reality of policy-making. They explain that the term policy coherence usually refers to the objective alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, but they suggest that true policy coherence is a process in which schools bridge and buffer these external demands, hence it is a "craft" (Honig & Hatch, 2004). The authors define "bridging" as

a school's "selective engagement of environmental demands to inform and enhance their implementation of goals and strategies" (Honig & Hatch, 2004, p. 23). In other words, bridging allows a school or district to use external policies as a means to further the school or district's internal goals. "Buffering" is an act of strategically determining how to engage in external demands in limited ways; Honig and Hatch (2004) caution that buffering is not a blind dismissal of external policies.

The concepts of bridging and buffering provide an argument that schools and school systems can craft policy coherence out of the multiple external demands in a way that is beneficial to the school. Furthermore, Honig and Hatch (2004) argue that even when being buffered these external demands can be constructive for schools and school systems. This argument can be applied to Greenfield. There is no shortage of external demands being placed on Greenfield. While compliant with the policy requirements, Greenfield leaders use the unfriendly political climate to create an ideological message that impels action.

Would this ideology be effective in a climate that was friendly to public education? No. In fact, the ideology wouldn't exist as it is based on the belief that the political climate is hostile to public schools. If there was no hostility toward public education, there would be no reason to combat it. Is it possible then, that this perceived hostility is a counter-intuitive means to bridge and buffer the external demands? It would seem counter-intuitive that an unfriendly political climate could actually create a foundation for a movement…but I argue that it is this shared sense of negative pressure that gives cause for solidarity.

Another point mentioned in the original literature review that bears consideration is grounded in Michael Fullan's concept of the "moral purpose" or "moral imperative" of a change leader. This concept gets a brief mention in the literature review, but I found that it anchored much of the experience of change for all four interviewed participants. After completing the data reduction, I returned to Fullan's writing on the role of "moral purpose" or "moral imperative" in the leadership of change. It sheds light on another area of Greenfield's unique case, and it merits discussion in this chapter.

In his book, "Leading in a Culture of Change," Fullan (2001) identifies what he calls five core competencies of leadership in a process of change. They are "attending to a broader moral purpose, keeping on top of the change process, cultivating relationships, sharing knowledge, and setting a vision and context for creating coherence in organizations" (p. 4). He argues that these competencies are only effective when threaded together, but the foundation of them all rests on a leader's ability to instill a moral purpose in the work. Fullan (2001) writes:

> Leadership, if it is to be effective has to 1) have an explicit "making a difference" sense of purpose, 2) use strategies that mobilize many people to tackle tough problems, 3) be held accountable by measured and debatable indicators of success, and 4) be ultimately assessed by the extent to which it awakens people's intrinsic commitment, which is none other than the mobilizing of everyone's sense of moral purpose. (p. 21)

He goes on to argue that a moral purpose certainly makes sense both in terms of making a contribution to society and developing employee commitment. Additionally, Fullan

(2001) uses moral imperative to draw a distinction between superficially charismatic leaders and genuinely effective leaders: "charismatic leaders generate short-term external commitment…effective leaders possess the magnetic luring power of exploring moral purpose through a series of change experiences, supported by collaborative relationships, that generate and sort out new knowledge" (p. 116).

As I got to know the leaders at Greenfield I was struck by their resolve and devotion to their work. There were days when they were frustrated and stressed. There were days when they were tired or sick. There were days ruled by disappointments. Yet, these individuals always persevered with enthusiasm. With the concept of ideology continually in the back of my mind, I wondered whether the broad, public moral statements that the leaders made about public education were nurtured by personal moral imperatives to continue to "fight the good fight." Each interview participant responded to the question of personal value systems with a very different, and compelling, personal story about their belief structure, but all four converged thematically under the concept of "service." Additionally, all four participants agreed that their belief structure influenced their determination for this work.

What conclusion can be drawn from this? I argue that the more general moral purpose implanted in the ideology of the district—that purpose being to maintain a healthy democracy through the public provision of a quality education for EVERY child—is founded on deeply embedded personal moral imperatives of each individual on cabinet. These individuals have chosen a career path that allows them to serve others in a way that provides personal fulfilment in spite of, or perhaps because of, the multitude of challenges that riddle this work.

Conclusion

The research problem presented in the first chapter states: The political pressure which culminates in the demand for school reform has created an environment of hasty decision-making, high stakes accountability systems, and uncertainty. In the presence of this pressure, are school districts able to respond with strides toward positive change?

The case of Greenfield Public Schools suggests that districts are able to respond with positive change even under the political pressure which demands school reform. Counter-intuitively, it may be *because* of this political pressure that Greenfield is able to activate its ideology so successfully. Greenfield is able to twist that pressure into positive energy for improvement.

It is not the pressure alone that allows Greenfield to create an ideology that spurs action. Greenfield's successful ideology is a combination of its members' sense of pride, willingness to meet the needs of all students, flat organizational structure, healthy executive leadership team, servant-minded superintendent, working Strategic Plan, effective system of communication, capacity to strategically fund initiatives that further the goals of the Strategic Plan, and support for teachers and support staff. Time will tell if this ideology has a lasting effect on the Greenfield efforts to produce a positive process of change.

Informed by the vast body of literature concerning meaningful school change (Elmore, 1991, 2004; Fullan, 1991, 2001, 2011, Cuban, 1988; Hess, 2011, Hall and Loucks, 1997; Kirp, 2013, Ravitch, 2010; Datnow & Park, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2005; and Sarason, 1990), I argue that this case adds evidence that change itself is not

improvement; change is not the result of empty rhetoric. Change is shared meaning, an incremental, bi-directional process, and an un-learning of certain embedded customs. Change takes patience, extensive knowledge, a working conceptual framework, and the personal commitment of leaders and workers on the ground. Change is the result of language that creates shared values. In the end, it is language—specifically an ideology—that links the general beliefs held by a few people about the context to specific actions taken by many to create positive, meaningful change in schools.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol Examples

Dr. Eisley Interview 2

I'm going to do a lot of jumping around, I think, because I want to try to cover a lot of ground

(Moral imperative)

1. What drives you? How much does your profession intersect with your values?

2. Do you need your colleagues to share that sense of purpose?

3. How much does that sense of purpose matter in education?

(Politics)

4. How much does the state legislature affect the work of GPS?

5. How about the governor? How much does her political posturing affect GPS?

6. What about the political climate of our state, in general, how much does it color the work of schools? For example the repeal of common core and the subculture that surrounded that issue…

7. What about local (micro) politics? Midwestern City's political climate—for example, the constant competition of competing interests for the philanthropic dollar?

8. Talk to me a little about [local education initiative].

9 How much time do you spend thinking about politics?

(Cabinet)

10. Let's talk a little about cabinet. I have found that you often start with a piece of news, an article…why do you do that?

11. Why is the Monday cabinet meeting important?

12. The first time I ever visited with you for this study you told me that cabinet was a lot like a family. Can you speak to that? Is that desirable? Is that common among school districts?

(Internal GPS)

13. I sat in on the meeting you had with some representatives from Apple: has anything come from that meeting? Similarly, I sat in on a meeting you had with the head of the Midwestern City YMCA: what is the update there?

14. What is the greatest internal challenge faced by GPS?

Heidi Buesking Interview 2

(Moral Imperative)
1. Let's just jump right in. Tell me, what drives you to do the work you do?

2. How important is it to you that your colleagues feel the same? That they share this sense of purpose?

3. Do you think 100% of your principals share this sense of purpose?

4. 100% of cabinet?

5. How does GPS work to create this shared sense of purpose? Was it always there?

6. You also talked about how you purposefully hire people. Does this moral imperative have something to do with the hires here?

7. Do you have a faith-based take on life? How much does that cross into your sense of purpose at work?

(Politics)
8. How much does the state legislature affect the work of GPS? How about the governor? How much does her political posturing affect GPS?

9. What about the political climate, in general, how much does it color the work of schools? For example the repeal of common core and the subculture that surrounded that issue…

10. Have you EVER felt like your work was supported by the political structure of this state?

11. What about local (micro) politics? Midwestern City's political climate—for example, the constant competition of competing interests for the philanthropic dollar? Can you give me an example of how that type of politics affects your work?

12. How much time do you spend thinking about politics?

(Cabinet)
13. Let's talk a little about cabinet. Why is the Monday cabinet meeting important?

14. Would you agree that cabinet is a lot like a family? Can you speak to that? Is that desirable? Is that common among school districts?

(T & L Innovation)
15. Is Greenfield innovative? How? Can you give me some examples?

16. Dr. Eisley talks about some districts being programs rich but systems poor and he is careful to make sure that that doesn't happen here. Do you think it's possible to be innovative without falling into the trap of programs-programs-programs?

Dr. Richards Interview 1

Let's just jump right in…

1. How was cabinet today? What did I miss?

2. How would you describe the way that the cabinet leadership team works? (The organizational structure of district-level administration)

3. Could you tell me a little about your position in the district? What do you do?

4. What does a typical day look like for you?

5. How would you describe your work personality? (What kind of leader are you? What kind of follower?)

6. What does the new semester bring for you, in terms of your work?

7. Going to switch gears here a little bit: This is a wider-scale question. What challenges do you think urban public school districts face in modern America?

8. What challenges does this district in particular face?

9. How does this district respond to those challenges?

10. How do these challenges affect you and your role, especially?

11. What kind of pressures and supports do you get from parents, principals, the community in general?

12. What does it take to develop a successful urban public school district?

13. What is the role of public schools in Midwestern City?

14. Does your position have an effect on what takes place in any given classroom in this district? How?

15. Do public school districts need to change to stay ahead of the game?

16. How did you develop your beliefs concerning public schools?

Appendix B: Master List of Codes

(StuSup) Student Support
(StuInolv) Student involvement
(Sports) sports
(Safety) safety
(GWAY) Greenfield Way
(G Excel) Greenfield Excellence
(GPRIDE) Greenfield Pride
(Accolades) Accolades
(CabCult) Cabinet Culture
(TAD) Tough Administrative Decision
(Admit/Fix) Admit it/fix it
(Dept.Resp) Departmental Responsibility/Clash
(Hollis Leg) Hollis Legacy
(Supt. Lang) Superintendent Language
(100% G, C&C) 100% Graduation, College and Career Ready
(StratPlan) Strategic Plan
(Ideology/MoralImp) Ideology/Moral Imperative/Social Justice
(Budget) Budget
(Tech) Technology
(Innovation) Innovation
(SchOp) Operations
(Media) Media
(TeachSup) Teacher Support
(PrinSup) Principal Support
(SupportStaffSup) Support Staff Support
(MeaningfulData) Meaningful Data
(I/M) Imaging/Messaging
(StuDems) Changing Student Demographics
(StuPov) Student Poverty
(WealthyStu) Wealthy Students
(Alumni) Alumni
(ParInvolv) Parent Involvement
(CommOut) Community Outreach
(Bond) Bond Issue
(UW) United Way
(Mascot) Mascot Controversy
(LocalPols) Local Politics
(Phil) Philanthropy
(UnivPartnership) University Partnerships
(FedPols) Federal Politics
(HighStakesTests) High Stakes Testing
(EdResearch) Education Research
(SchBrdPols) School Board Politics
(StatePols) State Politics

(StateSuptVil) State Superintendent “as villain”
(StateSchGrds) State School Grades
(StateSuptElection) State Superintendent Election
(Charter/Voucher/SchChoice) Charter/Voucher/School Choice
(TeachShort/Pay/Morale/etc)Teacher Shortage/Pay/Morale/Recruitment/Evaluations/Union
(DistRiv) District Fellows and Rivals

Appendix C: Summary Sheet Example

8/25/14 Cabinet Meeting

Themes
Cab Cult (9)
G. Mascot Controversy (5)
Meaningful data (5)
Tech (10)
Dept Responsibility (5)
Stu Sup (3)
Teach Sup (8)
Supt First Week Walkthrough (2)
Changing Stu Dems (1)
Teacher Shortage (2)
State Pols (6)
Operations (8)
Fellow/Rival Dist (4)
Charter Schools (10)
Moral Imperative (5)
Stu Safety (1)
Parent Involv (1)
Budget (3)
Bond (1)
Imaging/Messaging (8)
Teacher Evals (2)

Volume
Charter Schools (10)
Tech (10)
Cab Cult (9)
Teach Sup (8)
Imaging/Messaging (8)

Context
-3 days after first day of school
-little bit of an "edge" to the group, a lot of irons in the fire
-Big discussion concerning the opening of charter schools in rival district

Observer as Instrument
When I ask a question, everyone at the table is eager to engage in the discussion; they thought it was funny that I followed Dr. Eisley around for his 1st week walkthroughs

Quotes
pg. 43 "de jure segregation"

Appendix D: Matrix Example

	ME	HB	LB	LR
Ideology	15	26		58
Strat Plan	17			
Stu Support	14	12	11	30
Innovation	11		13	41
100% G, C&C	11			
G Pride	13		32	
Supt. Lang	30	13		
Princ Sup		14		
Rival District		13		
State Pols		10		22
Sch Choice				17
Stu Involv				16
Teacher Sup				16
IM			43	
Cab Culture			10	
Media			17	

Key:
ME: Michael Eisley
HB: Heidi Buesking
LB: Linda Burton
LR: Laura Richards

This matrix displays the "volume" of themes that occurred in the first interview conducted with all four interview participants. Here, volume refers to the frequency and emphasis placed on the theme.

Appendix E: Dr. Eisley's Kickoff Speech (Example of Artifact)

Celebrate the Journey ---- 2014 Kick-Off Speech

Good morning and welcome back. We have so much to be thankful for as we take time to reflect, celebrate, and renew our focus for this school year. I feel so fortunate to be a part of the Greenfield family and I hope you do too.

The children starting school this year will be retiring in 2075. No one really knows what the future will look like in the next decade, let alone in 2075. But, what we do know is we must continue to be innovative and provide the most engaging, supportive, and relevant learning experience possible to ensure our students' success regardless of what the future holds. Through Greenfield's five-year strategic plan we have a consistent, guiding vision that our students come first, that it is up to us to produce an environment that facilitates their learning, and that together, we will succeed.

We belong to a profession of hope – a district that believes in its students and in possibilities – a culture that respects the potential of young people and values the efforts of staff that work on behalf of society at large. I say this to you because we can't take what we do in our profession for granted or forget the importance of what we are trying to do with our audacious goal of 100 percent graduation, college and/or career ready. We are literally in the business of changing lives and families for generations to come.

Unfortunately it is not a good political climate for public education and for educators and I am most perplexed as to how we got here! We continue to see national and state policies aimed at demoralizing teachers, undermining the traditional governance of boards of education, re-segregating American communities and reducing the dynamic nature of learning to a testing obsession. There are also forces today that are trying to harm public education by stripping valuable resources and trying to influence the opinion that public education is a dismal failure.

These are serious threats that have already undermined what we know about good teaching and learning. We know that focus on the whole child can't simply be measured by a multiple-choice test that determines whether a student can graduate or move on to the fourth grade. We know that tying teacher pay to student test scores has never worked and yet policy makers are eager to promote this idea. It is time they quit using our public education system as a political pawn.

You can, however, take comfort in knowing that our Board of Education's commitment to you remains strong and unwavering as evidenced by the five percent stipend you received a few weeks ago, as well as, a 2.2 percent raise this school year. Fifty-six new positions were added to reduce class size and increase instructional support. Thanks to the prudent management of our Finance and Human Resources departments, we did not have to raise our insurance premiums this year while maintaining our generous health benefits package. I commit to you that we will continue our quest to influence state leaders and policy makers to increase per-pupil funding and teacher pay. Continuing to be last in our region in both areas is unacceptable. I understand the economic importance of exporting a chief resource such as oil, but I do not understand why [our state] continues to allow an equally important resource - our educators - to be exported to neighboring states. Given the fact that [our state] ranks [in the top ten states] in the nation in National Board Certified teachers, we possess some of the most qualified teachers in the nation. We know this to be true at Greenfield!

We have, however, accomplished some amazing things this past year to counter these forces. For one, we stood together and made sure our voices were heard when we rallied with more than 20,000 other colleagues in sending a clear message that public education is alive and well in [our state]. And, we will not sit quietly and allow public education to be overtaken by for-profit agencies who claim a better education through vouchers, charters, and virtual schools. Two generations of students have gone through the voucher school cycle and they are not performing any better than their peers in public schools. I am so proud to be associated with

such dedicated and caring professionals who believe in the importance of public education, and who are not afraid to stand up in order to preserve it. Who firmly believe in our motto that, "Together We Make a Difference."

The theme for kickoff this year is "Celebrate the Journey." I love this theme because it really does capture the essence of what we are about at Greenfield. We strive to provide a journey – from our emphasis on early childhood, neighborhood schools, STEM, and college and/or career ready - that is designed to ensure success regardless of one's demographics.

Each of us has a profound gift! It is true of our students as well - even when you think it is not. We all are born with deep talents and passions. And, it is up to us to provide a learning environment that cultivates these. Simplistically, we are held accountable for test scores but we know that we aspire to do so much more. We know that developing real academic achievement – individuals who can think and solve problems ethically and can contribute to society – won't be accomplished if we don't provide services to ensure that students who don't have support at home are healthy, well-fed, safe, emotionally stable, challenged and cared for in an environment of trust. Then they can be motivated to learn. When we leverage the talents of the people in this room with the support we have from our Board of Education, and the community, our students are treated to a tremendously rewarding experience. We continually strive to provide this type of environment at Greenfield – We call it "The Greenfield Way." As one of our valedictorians this past year said, "From the outside looking in you can't understand it, and from the inside looking out you can't explain it."

For most students, public education is the only hope they have. We know all too well, that not every student is well-suited for the educational journey. But, given the right support, advocacy, intervention, enrichment, and time, they do incredibly well as evidenced by the fact that we only have 11 students from the classes of 2012, 2013, and 2014 who have not met the high-stakes

testing requirements for graduation! This is truly a remarkable accomplishment when you consider these graduating classes represent over 3,300 students. This is tough work! But, we know the value of receiving a quality education will only increase throughout one's life.

Our world is rapidly changing. And perhaps the one area that is changing the most is technology. Sir Ken Robinson – one of the foremost educational thinkers – states that technology – especially digital technology – is developing at a rate that most people cannot properly grasp. It is also contributing to what some pundits are calling the biggest generational gap since rock and roll. Just as technology has changed the way we live our lives, it is literally transforming education in an equally dramatic fashion. Apple has converted over 90 percent of textbooks to a digital format. More and more teachers are realizing the power of technology by differentiating instruction and energizing lessons with QR codes and literally flipping the classrooms in order to enhance student learning.

Greenfield was one of the first schools to embrace the idea of allowing our students to utilize technology. And, more than 800 of our students are taking advantage of a blended-learning model through Greenfield's Virtual School. We have recently added 2,600 mobile devices. This is good news, but it is not enough. To our students – our digital natives – time is learning's warden. We must continue to embrace technology's potential and even challenge ourselves to think differently about its use to enhance teaching and learning.

Greenfield Public Schools continues to be a beacon for success. School districts like ours have an ethical obligation to lead the way into the future. We are the ones who will have to find solutions to paradoxical issues:

At a time when high-stakes testing seems to be systemizing the educational process, Greenfield will continue to encourage the unique potential of each individual child and uphold the art of teaching.

At a time when some children can read when they enter kindergarten and others have never held a book in their hands, Greenfield will continue to expand our early childhood education program to ensure equity and school readiness.

At a time when record tax cuts continue to erode our funding, Greenfield will continue to partner with agencies and faith-based partners in order to enhance learning while mitigating the effects of poverty among our students.

If we want a better future for our society and our kids, we have the power to take the lead – even if it is just here in our district for our students and community.

And leading we are…

The Class of 2014 had [certain number of] students recognized as National Merit or Commended Scholars. We were back-to-back State Science Olympiad Champions. And, for the second year in a row, we were the Class 6A champions for graduating the most [of our state]'s Promise participants.

More than 600 hours of college credit were earned this past year through our [name of] program, a partnership with Midwestern City Community College.

Our Special Olympians were amazing as they captured 91 medals and ribbons at Special Olympics this past spring!

Another exciting initiative this year – Career Connections – will seek to expand relevant learning opportunities by giving our students hands-on working experience as part of their school day in areas such as engineering, community/sports medicine, coding/computer science, teaching, and marketing.

Our Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) initiative continues to expand as we implement coding this year at the secondary level and the … Engineering Program will be expanded to include Clover Meadow and Miles elementary. The plan is to continue to expand this program to all elementaries.

The first ever STEM Night Roller Coaster Activity was held this year at the 6th/7th Grade Center and it was the best. The classroom was actually flipped as our students taught the parents about engineering principles and then tested their knowledge by challenging them to build a roller coaster. Our families thoroughly enjoyed the experience and it proved to be an engaging event for the family as parents and children of all ages worked together.

Greenfield's Adult Community Education Program, under the guidance of Lucy Anderson, served a record 3,200 adults this past year. And, we recently were asked to serve the communities of Lincoln, Doherty, Neoga, and Hidden Falls.

Our Greenfield Schools Education Foundation now has a record endowment of almost $2 million dollars.

Greenfield's award-winning fine arts program continues to grow as more than 80 percent of our students are enrolled in fine arts at the middle school level. And, the [Band Crew], under new band director, Leon Saldana, will march with around 275 students this school year – the largest ever… Caleb Sampson, our amazing drama instructor, and his colleagues are preparing for yet another outstanding show…

Our sports marketing class, under the direction of Joni Baldwin, is working hard to create project-based learning experiences for students that are proving to generate more school spirit at our events while also teaching them about important aspects of sports marketing. These are the types of learning experiences we must expand on if we are to provide a more relevant and engaging classroom.

Greenfield head athletic trainer, Paul Harrison, was selected as the 2014 Athletic Training Service Award recipient by the National Athletic Trainers Association.

Our athletic program continues to be one of the best in the country! More than 1600 students are engaged in athletics and they continue to make us proud in their many accomplishments both on and off the field. More than 3,300 hours of community service were provided this past year by our student-athletes and coaches. We had [certain number of] all-state athletes, but more importantly we had 289 academic all-conference awards earned by our student-athletes. Our Varsity Cheerleading squad, under the direction of Karen Gibson and Brooke Schultz, was the 6A State Champions. Our girls' golf team won [another] 6A State Championship. And, Coach Ricky Julisco brought back home the 6A State Basketball Championship to Greenfield this past year. He also garnered the [our state] Coaches Association Coach of the Year award and was a finalist for National Coach of the Year. This school year will surely prove to be another banner year as our athletic programs are preparing for their seasons. We start off the year in a big way - as our football team…[and] spirit groups…take on perennial power Stewardson-Strasburg in what will surely be a great event for all involved.

We know our student and organization success is attributed to a tremendously dedicated staff. We are proud to recognize Greenfield's Support Employee of the Year, Kyle Christopher. Congratulations also to our Teacher of the Year, Bruce Gellman. Both of these employees are great ambassadors for Greenfield and represent the excellence within our organization. They both are very deserving of this honor.

Our child nutrition program, under the direction of Tina Shelton is amazing! More than 1.5 million lunches are served annually and our recipes are carefully created and executed by Greenfield's own executive chef, Vince Lowe. Who would have ever thought you could get kids to like kale?

Our grounds, transportation, construction, and maintenance personnel have been extremely busy this summer to ensure that we are ready for school. You will notice upgrades this year in the areas of technology and construction. The technology department has been busy as more than 6,500 computers have been reimaged in order to prepare for our new student management system – [name of program]. We also now have an online HR Application System and soon, we will have an online child nutrition program to better serve our students and families. Numerous projects – the [Intermediary School] Expansion Project that included additional classrooms, offices, and a state-of-the-art clinic that will be run in partnership with Our State University, flooring upgrades at Lewis and Staley, a new high school track, security door upgrades at Abigail Adams, Patton, and Monroe, purchase of land for our next elementary, and many other projects have been, or soon will be completed.

Greenfield continues to grow! This is not surprising as we are doing amazing things on behalf of our students. Our community believes in our mission as evidenced by our 80 percent passing rate this past year on our bond issue. Greenfield Public Schools is on an amazing journey! I am so proud to be associated with such a committed and caring organization.

This past year, the world lost an amazing leader in Nelson Mandela. His life was a testament to the enduring human spirit and the importance of why we must continue to believe and invest heavily in our students. Education was of great importance to him and he immensely valued its power in developing people and nations.

There is a word in South Africa that Mandela lived by called "Ubuntu." The word signifies that we are all bound together in ways that we cannot always see; that we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others, and caring for those around us.

We have almost 16,000 students within our care. All expecting us to give them the best learning experience they could ever ask for. As parents, we would demand and expect nothing less. I am

confident in each one of you and in our ability to continue our journey of 100 percent graduation, college and/or career ready. As our students journey through their lives, they too, will someday take the time to realize the meaning of Ubuntu and say – "I am because of you."

Let us never forget about the significance of what we do in preparing our youth for the future. Don't give up on them - ever! It is our gift to every student that we are preparing them for a future we may never see. I wish you all the best year ever!

Appendix F: Institutional Review Board Letter

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Expedited Review – AP01

Date: February 03, 2015 **IRB#:** 5165

Principal Investigator: Ellen A Dollarhide

Approval Date: 02/02/2015

Expiration Date: 01/31/2016

Study Title: TURNING WORDS INTO ACTION: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING HOW IDEOLOGY LINKS CONTEXT AND CHANGE

Expedited Category: 6 & 7

Collection/Use of PHI: No

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above- referenced research study. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

Note—The IRB has revised your consent forms to include the required "Benefits" section and the statement in the "Confidentiality" section informing the participants that the IRB may also have access to the research data.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board